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2020

## An Evaluation of the Montgomery County Reentry Career Alliance Academy

Catherine Marliese Driver  
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AN EVALUATION OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY REENTRY CAREER  
ALLIANCE ACADEMY

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

by

Catherine Marliese Driver  
BS, Wright State University, 2016

2020

Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL

12/10/2020

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY  
SUPERVISION BY Catherine Marliese Driver ENTITLED An Evaluation of the  
Montgomery County Reentry Career Alliance Academy BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

Driver, Catherine Marliese. MA, Applied Behavioral Sciences, Wright State University, 2020. An Evaluation of the Montgomery County Reentry Career Alliance Academy.

As a result of a deterrence and incapacitation focused criminal justice system in the United States, reentry programming has become integral to both reduce criminal justice spending and mass incarceration. Reentry programming assists those released from prison with reintegration into society to prevent recidivism and allow the returning citizen to become a productive member of society. This study evaluated one such reentry program in Montgomery County Ohio. The Reentry Career Alliance Academy (RCAA) is a career focused work readiness curriculum that also includes workshops with community stakeholders. Evaluation was completed through paired T Test analysis in pre- and post-questionnaire responses. Thematic analysis was also conducted to evaluate areas of need, resource requests, program satisfaction, and other variable such as housing, transportation, and a desire to further education. The analysis in this study indicated that the RCAA program is a turning point in participant's lives and strengthens informal social bonds.

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## **I. Introduction**

In the United States, it costs over \$30,000 to incarcerate an inmate for one year. That number translates into billions every year that American taxpayers cover (Aharoni, Kleider-Offutt, Brosnan & Watzek, 2019). That \$30,000 includes food, housing, prison operations, and health care for the inmate. Health care costs alone make up 18% of the yearly cost of an inmate (Sridhar, Cornish & Fazel, 2018). As an inmate ages, the cost of their care only increases as more medical conditions develop. These mounting costs have forced the need for solutions to reduce the amount of people entering or returning to prison. After decades of low-tolerance policies when it came to inmate release and rehabilitation, the mid 2000's ushered in policies regarding reentry initiatives and a greater focus on lowering prison numbers (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). As a response to those initiatives, states and counties across the United States have adopted offices specifically for reentry. The goal of these offices is to address the challenges of reentry to reduce overall prison numbers. Reentry initiatives connect the returning citizens with resources in their communities and provide them with the skills needed to become successful (Jonson & Cullen, 2015).

The issue of recidivism is tied to reentry. Recidivism refers to a relapse into criminal behavior after previous incarceration or punishment. In most studies regarding recidivism, recidivism is defined as a formerly incarcerated individual who violates parole or commits a new offense within three years after their release (National Institute



of Justice, 2008). Recidivism is a multifaceted issue as it not only results in an increase in prison numbers but also it highlights the ineffectiveness of the current criminal justice system. Currently, the United States criminal justice system is deterrence and incapacitation focused. Deterrence is based on the principle that fear of punishment is enough to stop an individual from committing a crime. Incapacitation refers to assigning punishment based on the offender's offense type and their future risk of committing criminal behavior. However, high imprisonment numbers and recidivism rates argue against the effectiveness of these principles. From the period of 2005 to 2014 an estimated 68% of released state prisoners were arrested within three years, 79% within six years, and 84% within nine years (Alper, Durose & Markman, 2018). This high turnover rate in released prisoners has led to an increased focus on the reentry process and how to reduce recidivism. If deterrence and incapacitation were effective, imprisonment numbers would drop due to fear of going to prison. In addition, recidivism rates would drop as harsh incapacitation principles may result in a more severe punishment for additional offenses. From the period of 2005 to 2014 an estimated 68% of released state prisoners were arrested within three years, 79% within six years, and 84% within nine years (Alper, Durose & Markman, 2018). This high turnover rate in released prisoners has led to an increased focus on the reentry process and how to reduce recidivism.

Reentry refers to the process of inmates leaving incarceration and returning to their communities. Although reentry is the goal for incarcerated individuals, it presents many challenges. A felony record makes reintegration into society very difficult. At the most basic level, those returning to their communities must have housing, food, and

employment. Housing and employment can be very difficult to find without assistance if one has a criminal record (Phillips & Spencer, 2013). Legal initiatives have recently tried to address employment issues with the “Ban the Box” movement. This movement pushed for a removal of the felony question on job applications to prevent employers from disregarding former felon’s applications at first glance. However, the success of these initiatives has been debated (Flake, 2019).

Transportation is another obstacle faced as having a felony record can make obtaining a driver’s license very difficult. Public transportation also requires a pass to be bought which can be difficult to pay for without employment. Maintaining a job can be difficult if one does not have reliable transportation. Civic duties such as voting are also much harder, if not impossible, to regain if one has a felony record. Returning citizens must also overcome many personal obstacles. Support from family and friends is crucial for healthy reintegration into society. However, some of those relationships are tarnished by incarceration and take effort to repair. In some cases, previous relationships may have to be ended to ensure desistance from criminal activity. For some returning citizens, going back into their communities can mean an immediate return to criminal behavior. That individual would then have to make the choice between being immersed in a negative environment or not returning to their home. (Lattimore, 2007).

In addition to these personal obstacles, the returning citizens often deal with the stigma of previous incarceration. This stigma can be found in all areas of their life and can lead to feelings of hopelessness (Simmons, Wiklund, & Levie, 2014). These difficulties present a need for assistance for those returning to society if we want to reduce recidivism and therefore the cost of incarceration.

Ohio is not immune to the struggles of high prison costs and recidivism. In Ohio, the average daily cost per inmate is \$83.724 amounting to a yearly cost of \$1,484,312,585.00. As of August 2020, Ohio has a prison population of 45,047. However, in the fiscal year of 2019, Ohio released 22,161 inmates. This number was consistent with release numbers from 2018 in which 22,617 inmates were released and slightly lower than 23,828 inmates released in 2017 and 23,853 in 2016 (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, 2020). This release number indicates a large population that have entered the precarious reentry phase in just the last year. With a state-wide three-year recidivism rate of 31.45% reported in 2018, Ohio is below the national average for recidivism (Ohio Bureau of Research and Evaluation, 2018). However, that is still a large number of offenders returning to prison. Ohio has multiple programs in place to address the issue of reentry and has a dedicated department within the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections entitled the Reentry Services Department. This office facilitates connections to many reentry programs containing employment training and placement, religious involvement, and community engagement. Ohio's commitment to reentry can be found at the county level as well as the state level. One county level program in particular is the Montgomery County Office of Reentry. The Montgomery County Office of Reentry is a county office that involves the community with the goal of removing barriers of reentry to promote successful reintegration into their communities (Montgomery County Office of Reentry, n.d.).

As evidenced above, the idea of focusing on reentry is a recent change compared to the "get tough" policies of the 1990's. Implementation of reentry programs continues to increase nationwide but research on these programs is still limited, especially

regarding longitudinal studies. The need for reentry programming continues to grow and has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to reduce prison numbers and in turn reduce the spread of COVID-19, some states authorized that prisoners within ninety days of scheduled release be released early (Abraham, Brown, & Thomas, 2020). The complications of a global pandemic only further emphasize the need for guidance and support upon release from prison. The aim of this study was to evaluate the Reentry Career Alliance Academy offered by the Montgomery County Office of Reentry to analyze and identify the areas of their program that are successful and where improvements can be made. This study will add to missing research in the field of reentry as there are few studies that take an in-depth view at what factors promote criminal desistance instead of a focus on recidivism alone.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **History of Reentry**

The current focus on reentry is a result of legal policies and changes that have occurred over the last 60 years. In the 1960's, the focus of the criminal justice system was on rehabilitative correction and treatment. There was movement away from larger prison numbers and more of an emphasis on community corrections. This included implementation of halfway houses, relationships with offenders, delivery of treatment services, and community engagement. However, lawmakers in the 1970's reversed these changes and returned to a stricter punishment system (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). These stringent guidelines only increased during the War on Drugs which was initiated in the 1980's. This time period brought about determinate sentencing which allowed little chance for parole release and brought about harsh sentences, such as the three-strike rule. In Ohio, determinate sentencing was added back into their criminal code in 1974, 61 years after it had last been enforced (Knopp, 2015). The three-strike rule stated that after a third offense, the offender could be given a life sentence. As a result, prison numbers skyrocketed in this time period. In 1980, the prison population was 315,974. That number jumped to 739, 980 in 1990 and up to 1,331,278 in the year 2000 (Criminal Justice Facts, 2020). This led to a culture of imprisoning an offender and forgetting about them after they went to prison.

This culture was based on incapacitation ideals. Reentry was not a focus in the legal system until 2008 when prison numbers had reached a record high at 1,610,446 (Criminal Justice Facts, 2020). Reentry initiatives would be needed to undo the damage done by harsh policies of the past. The Second Chance Act was presented in 2007 and signed into law in 2008. This act required that state related entities that were applying for grants involving offender programs must include a reentry plan (Pinard, 2010). Although this act was a step in the right direction, reentry has continued to lag as the primary focus in all areas of the criminal justice system in the United States.

A focus more directed towards reentry will require a shift in the criminal justice system. This shift will have to come from the court system, prisons, staff, state legislature, local legislature and from the community. The current focus of the criminal justice system is deterrence and incapacitation based. Deterrence theory states that crime occurs when the benefits of committing a crime outweigh the risks of punishment. In this theoretical framework, crime will stop when the punishment becomes too severe (Jacobs, 2010). The assumption in this theory is that those committing crimes are weighing the costs and benefits of the crimes they commit. If this assumption were true, all crime would cease if punishment is severe enough to deter criminal behavior. Mass incarceration issues have shown this is not the case.

There are many factors that affect someone's decision to commit a crime. Personality traits, gang affiliations, survival, and addiction are all examples of factors that can all affect the decision to commit criminal acts. Some offenders also believe they will not be caught, especially if they have successfully committed a crime in the past.

Deterrence can be effective with subsections of the population but within parts of the population that were already unlikely to engage in criminal behavior (Jacobs, 2010).

Another aspect of a deterrence-based criminal justice system is the lack of a rehabilitative focus. In deterrence-based criminal justice systems, punishment is the last phase. The harsh punishment suffered by those who commit a crime can be used as an example to those in the public as to what happens when an individual commits a crime. There is no focus on rehabilitation while incarcerated. The result is a 'lock them up and throw away the key' mentality. This mentality is rooted in incapacitation theory. Incapacitation theory does not focus on rehabilitating an offender at all. Instead, incapacitation's goal is protecting the public by evaluating the risk level of an offender and making a punishment decision based on those risk factors (Geerken & Gove, 1977).

This incapacitation based criminal justice system led to implementations of austere laws such as the three strikes law. In this theoretical perspective, committing three felonies indicated offenders were a threat to society and should not be allowed to be released. Incapacitation does not take into account drug abuse, gang affiliation, or other factors in an offender's life that could be addressed to stop criminal behavior. The combination of deterrence and incapacitation results in high prison numbers and little focus on assisting the offender. This is not to say that rehabilitation efforts are not present in prison. Many facilities offer vocational, educational, and religious programs. The issue is that the community and members of the criminal justice system do not feel rehabilitation is important due to deterrence and incapacitation-based laws. The shift from deterrence and incapacitation to a more rehabilitative reentry-based system will require sweeping changes in the criminal justice system. All parties must be involved to

fully implement reentry efforts nationwide. The shift to a reentry focus will be encouraged by the success of reentry programs that have already been implemented.

### **Challenges to Reentry**

Returning home after being in prison is a challenging task. Although it is the goal for many in prison, there are many obstacles one must face when released. The first obstacle one must face upon release is where they will go. Renting or buying a home is very difficult as a returning citizen. Having a criminal record can make getting a loan very difficult and some landlords do not rent to those with a felony record. Even governmental-assisted housing has restrictions on renting to those with certain offenses on their record (Phillips & Spencer, 2013). If they have a good relationship with their friends and families, many returning citizens will go to stay with a family member or a friend. Others who are not as fortunate or those who do not want to return to their community must look for other options. For some of those who are released from prison, going back to their home community is not a good idea. Returning to where they are from could mean a direct return to criminal behavior (Phillips & Spencer, 2013). Having a criminal record can sever relationships with family or friends leaving the returning citizen without a housing option upon release. Those without family or friends to stay with upon release encounter obstacles in securing housing on their own.

There are temporary housing solutions, such as halfway houses, that provide a place for returning citizens to stay. However, halfway houses often have rules and guidelines that returning citizens have difficulty adhering to (Wong, Bouchard, Gushue, & Lee, 2019). Halfway houses often have limited capacity and can be difficult to get into.



Halfway houses also present additional obstacles such as the potential challenges of being housed with those of the opposite sex and the temptations of returning to crime to secure better housing. These difficulties presented in halfway houses are exacerbated for women returning to society. Being housed with other men may result in women being sexually harassed or abused. Other housing options would then include staying in hotels, shelters, or being homeless. Housing is not only key for survival but also has been shown to affect recidivism. Stable housing has been a significant factor in reducing likelihood of re-offending. Conversely, homelessness increases risk factors for engaging in criminal behavior to (Wong, Bouchard, Gushue, & Lee, 2019).

Regardless of what housing a returning citizen is in, employment will be key for maintaining or improving their housing situation. If they are staying with friends, family, or in temporary housing ,most people will want a place of their own. If they have bought or are renting, there are monthly housing bills that must be paid. In addition, employment will be necessary to allow a returning citizen to be independent. The largest barrier to securing employment for returning citizens is their criminal record. Most employers conduct background checks, and the presence of a criminal record can discount an application (Pager, 2003).

In response, some states have instituted “Ban the Box” initiatives which remove criminal history inquiries from initial application phases and utilize them further in the hiring process (Anderson, 2019). The intent behind the delay in the disclosure of criminal history is to allow returning citizens to go farther in the hiring process so they can present their qualifications and have a better chance at securing employment. For some businesses, the criminal record question on an application is used to weed through and

remove certain applications from the process. When a returning citizen can present their qualifications and potentially go through an interview, there is less of a chance that their criminal record will determine their likelihood of employment (Anderson, 2019).

Another large employment barrier returning citizens face is technological advancements in employment processes. Depending on when an individual was incarcerated, they may not be familiar with online applications or word processing tools used to make resumes. Technology also changes quickly and even those who were recently incarcerated may have difficulty navigating new technology. These challenges must be addressed when assisting returning citizens with securing a job. Employment is not only necessary for independence and survival but has been shown to have positive effects on reducing recidivism (Phillips & Spencer, 2013). As employment is the next step in the returning citizens path to successful reintegration reentry programs will be requisite to assist in technology training and job placement.

Coinciding with employment, financial security is important for returning citizens. Depending on their previous experiences, offenders may not have been educated on financial management and well-being. In addition to everyday financial needs, incarceration can also bring about expenses including court fees and restitution. Restitution payments can be a condition of parole and therefore ensuring they are paid is crucial to prevent future incarceration (Pogrebin, West-Smith, Walker, & Unnithan, 2014). Financial security can determine an individual's ability to remain independent. Maintaining a good financial standing has also been shown to have a direct effect on returning citizen's confidence in succeeding in society (Pogrebin, West-Smith, Walker, & Unnithan, 2014). This confidence can be the difference in a returning citizen's decision to

engage in criminal behavior again. If an individual does not believe that they can lead a successful life outside of prison, there will be little motivation to abstain from criminal behavior. Financial education is very important in the reentry process and can have a direct effect on recidivism (Martin, 2011). Obtaining public assistance is also a difficult task for those who have been incarcerated. For example, those with drug related felonies are disqualified from receiving public assistance as well as violating parole (Phillips & Spencer, 2013).

While reuniting with family is something many returning citizens look forward to, it can present challenges. In some instances, such as domestic violence, child abuse, and some sexual offenses, family members could have been the victims. This can eliminate reconciliation for some returning citizens. If reconciliation is possible, it will be a long and difficult process for most. For some, their families or home communities could have been what got them involved in criminal behavior in the first place. Those who grow up in impoverished communities are often introduced to criminal behavior at younger ages and it can be more of a social norm to engage in illegal activity. The same is true for those who were incarcerated because of drug addiction (Visher & Travis, 2003). If someone is recovering from addiction, a return to their community could mean immediate relapse. If returning to one's family and home will be a positive change, it is highly recommended as familial support has been shown to support positive reentry experiences (Mowen, Stansfield, & Boman, 2019). Family support can provide assistance with navigating other obstacles present in reentry. Family can provide housing, employment connections, and support for reintegration into society and refraining from criminal behavior (Phillips & Spencer, 2013). However, family relationships often

require work after incarceration. Some relationships have been weakened or even broken by the period the returning citizen spent in prison. There can be feelings of anger or resentment as well as a loss of trust in the returning citizen. The difficulties presented in the reentry process can also cause tension and frustration in familial relationships as the returning citizen adjusts to life outside of prison (Phillips & Spencer, 2013).

Returning citizens also face many personal obstacles. Between fourteen and seventeen percent of those incarcerated have a serious mental illness and will require assistance upon release (Kriegel, 2019). Mental illness services are not always easy to obtain access to and some medications will only be prescribed with regular doctor visits. This can leave returning citizen's with mental illnesses in a precarious situation. While incarcerated, they were receiving their medication daily and upon release there may not be any assistance for them. Returning citizens who have a mental illness diagnosis have higher rates of recidivism (Kriegel, 2019). Often coinciding with mental illness, substance abuse issues also present challenges to reentry. Those with a mental illness diagnosis are more likely to engage in substance abuse upon release from prison (Kriegel, 2019). As mentioned previously, substance abuse can determine where one lives and who they engage with in order to prevent relapse. Substance abuse treatment is not always present in prison and illegal drugs can often still be obtained in prison (Bales, Van Slyke, & Blomberg, 2006). Mental illness and substance abuse can both have detrimental effects on a returning citizen in addition to the factors previously mentioned.

Smaller everyday hurdles can also have negative implications for a returning citizen. There is a stigma that surrounds someone who has been incarcerated. One's community, peers, and family can all view them different after spending time in prison.

This stigma can make it difficult for the returning citizen to want to engage with their community and become a productive member of society. It can also have negative effects on employer's hiring decisions (Anderson, 2019). A solution to stigma-related issues is record expungement after conditions have been met but this idea is not well received in most of the criminal justice community (Phillips & Spencer, 2013). There can be difficulties in obtaining a driver's license and personal documents, such as a birth certificate or social security card, upon release if one does not have the original documents (Phillips & Spencer, 2013). Depending on the state one lives in, those with a criminal record may not be granted voting rights upon release. If regaining voting rights is possible, the returning citizen will have to overcome many obstacles to regain those rights (Dawson-Edwards, 2008). This lack of engaging in their civic duties can cause the returning citizen to feel ostracized from their community (Mauer & Kansal, 2005). Although some of these issues can seem minor, the culmination of these obstacles can seem insurmountable to the returning citizen.

### **Implementation of Reentry Programs**

Implementation of reentry courts in the United States began in 2001. Reentry courts are specialized dockets that target offenders being released from prison under court supervision. The Office of Justice Programs sponsored an initiative known as the Reentry Court Initiative. Nine sites were selected to begin implementation of reentry courts with the intent of improving tracking and supervision of returning citizens, preparing communities to address public safety, and providing the returning citizens with the services they needed to successfully reintegrate (Knopp, 2015). After decades of focusing on punishment in the criminal justice system, there was little guidance on how to

implement reentry courts and programming. The Reentry Court Initiative encouraged the original pilot sites to experiment with what worked best for their communities. However, there were six elements implemented into each reentry court. These elements included assessment, planning, judicial oversight, management of support services, community accountability, and the use of rewards and sanctions (Knopp, 2015). Reentry courts paved the way for the introduction of other reentry programming as well.

As reentry programming became more widespread, different types of reentry programs began to appear. Reentry was a new concept for the United States and different programs developed in response to their community needs. Reentry programs differ in every state and county across the United States. They can begin either inside or outside of prison and can be government run or independent. There are also many faith-based reentry programs that assist returning citizens as well (Wilkinson, Rhine, & Henderson-Hurley, 2005). Some programs focus on offense type and offer specific programming for violent offenders and sex offenders. Other programs offer support for specific personal issues such as addiction and mental health. Some areas of the country have multiple types of reentry programming available to their returning citizens. Most programs include employment education and placement options, housing assistance, and community connections. They often also focus on connecting the returning citizen to a strong support network within their community whether it is friends, family, or a new peer group that will help them succeed (Jonson, & Cullen, 2015).

Implementation of reentry programs is a complicated task. Community engagement and support are critical to the success of these programs. Funding for reentry programs can come from grants or donations but often taxes are used to support these

programs. If the community does not support reentry programming, there will be resistance against using their taxes to pay for that programming. A study based in Missouri found that even those who support reentry programming do not always support their tax dollars being used to pay for reentry programs. In this study, 89% of the respondents indicated that helping prisoners adjust to society was a good initiative and 68% agree that communities should provide programs and services to help those returning to society. However, only 22% of those surveyed indicated they would be willing to pay higher taxes to support these initiatives (Garland, Wodahl, & Schuhmann, 2013). This study presents a dilemma. There is public support for reentry initiatives but not support for funding these programs. In addition to the challenges of financial support, there are personal attributes that can affect reentry support. Factors that have been shown to indicate more support for reentry include being female, holding more liberal political views, and having interpersonal contact with someone who has previously been incarcerated (Rade, Desmarais, & Burnette, 2018). Having a belief in a just world also has proven to be correlated with reentry support. Those with strongly held religious beliefs were less likely to support reentry (Rade, Desmarais, & Burnette, 2018). Many of those factors are not easily changed as they can be key aspects of one's personality.

Although integrating the community into reentry efforts presents challenges, theoretical views can provide unique insight when discussing community engagement. One such study indicates that focusing on three facets of community engagement in reentry can be effective. They are changing the image of the returning citizen, enhancing the self-image and skill sets of returning citizens, and building capacity for support and guardianship in the community (Bazemore & Boba, 2007). The first facet addresses the

stigma surrounding those who have been incarcerated. Changing how the community views returning citizens is necessary for them to fully engage in the reentry process. The second facet of enhancing self-image and skill sets refers to setting the returning citizen up for success in gaining employment, housing, and other necessary material functions that will allow them to integrate back into society. The final tenet is directly related to bringing the community into the reentry process. This increase in support and guardianship will increase the returning citizen's trust in their communities and help to reduce the stigma surrounding returning citizens when more direct connections are made. Community integration is integral to bring about change to reentry programming.

### **Effectiveness of Reentry Programs**

Determining the effectiveness of reentry programs can prove to be difficult. As reentry is a more recent focus in the criminal justice system, there are limited longitudinal studies determining their lasting effects. As mentioned previously, there are many different types of reentry programs across the United States. Reentry programs vary in their format and data collection methods so comparison across programs can prove difficult. However, examining programs by their focus areas can indicate what aspects are successful in terms of reducing recidivism. Employment assistance has proven effective in reducing recidivism when job skills are taught that extend beyond short term solutions. Changing behaviors is also key to preventing recidivism. This is done by addressing criminal thinking behaviors and teaching prosocial behaviors that will help the returning citizen transition into society (Latessa, 2012). Educational opportunities were also shown to have positive effects on reducing recidivism (Silver, Cochran, Motz, & Nedelec, 2020).



Emphasis has also been placed on the relationships established between program participants and facilitators. These relationships provided the returning citizen a point of connection in their community. These connections are informal social bonds. The establishment of these bonds can be a turning point for the lives of returning citizens. The influence of these informal social bonds were even more meaningful when established while the returning citizen was still incarcerated through outreach and reentry preparation. Peer groups have also been found to positively impact the reentry experience through having a sense of community with others going through the same experiences (Mizel & Abrams, 2019). Another consideration for determining effectiveness of reentry initiatives lies in the returning citizen's trust in their community and government. The long-term goal of these programs is to prevent them from returning to criminal behavior and integrating the returning citizen into society. To achieve that goal the reentry programming implemented must instill faith in one's community. Going through the criminal justice system and into prison can make an individual feel marginalized and isolated. Their experiences may deter the returning citizen from engaging with their community. Encouraging community integration into reentry programs can assist the returning citizen in creating positive relationships and trust (DeHaan, Stewart, & Bloom, 2019).

### **Participant's Perspective on Reentry Programs**

Most evaluations of reentry programs focus on recidivism as the only measure of success. Although recidivism is a main goal of reentry programs, that focus does not consider the overall experience of returning citizens participating in reentry programs. This finding makes participant opinions and recommendations important when evaluating

reentry programs. Including the returning citizen's perspective not only can make them feel more connected to the reentry process but can also provide insight that may not be obvious to those who have never been through the reentry process. Research involving participant's perspectives is rare, but there are studies that highlight the participant's experience. Needs surveys prove to be particularly informative when considering the returning citizen's reentry obstacles. These surveys are often presented to participants early in the reentry program to connect them with the services they need. The top needs reported by returning citizens are transportation, housing, clothing, and food (Morani, Wikoff, Linhorst, & Bratton, 2011). Other reported needs include employment and education training including completion of GED requirements or an interest in college classes. Needs surveys can also address if an individual is suffering from substance abuse or mental health problems in order to connect them with vital services for those conditions as early as possible.

A study by Bender, Cobbina, & McGarrell (2016) found that employment was recorded as a key component of reentry programs for participants. The participants indicated that employment assistance and training was important, especially in navigating employment processes that required computer skills (Bender, Cobbina, & McGarrell, 2016). However, some participants expressed frustration in that they wanted more assistance in securing a position. Some responses indicated that the returning citizens felt that their reentry program provided adequate preparation, but that they needed more assistance with job placement. Reasons for this lack of placement range from a lack of jobs available for their skill set to the stigma of hiring those who were previously incarcerated (Bender, Cobbina, & McGarrell, 2016).

Another frequently mentioned factor by reentry program participants is creating or participating in relationships to positive entities in their lives upon release. One reentry program specifically operates by pairing returning citizens with a mentor. One participant indicated that they had been in and out of prison since they were eleven and that the impact of their mentor changed their life (Kenemore & In, 2020). This direct form of mentorship is not present in all reentry programming. However, even the engagement and guidance of program facilitators who work with all participants in the program were shown to be important to returning citizens (Bender, Cobbina, & McGarrell, 2016). Relationships were also established with community resources such as faith-based groups. One faith-based program includes group sessions based around a twelve-step program. Participants in this program found those faith-based interactions to be very useful for adapting to life outside of prison (Roberts & Stacer, 2016). Regardless of the format of the program, relationships with stable community members are important for assisting the returning citizen in the reentry process.

An important finding from participant responses is the need for personal change. Participants across multiple types of reentry programs indicated that the participant had to want to make a change in their life. Multiple participants in one program stated that the staff they worked with were great influences and did whatever possible to assist them, but the program would not work if they were not willing to change (Bender, Cobbina, & McGarrell, 2016). This finding was duplicated in the faith-based programs as those participants indicated that they needed to be able to accept the tenants of the program and be open to real change (Roberts & Stacer, 2016). This finding could present barriers to the reentry process but also provides valuable insight. Success in reentry requires the

participant to be fully engaged and willing to change. Program facilitators can be upfront with this information to prepare those entering the program for their best pathway to success.

### **Reentry in Ohio**

Ohio has been at the forefront of community corrections, including reentry, since the focus on reentry swept the nation. Beginning in the 1990's, Ohio started to implement a community-corrections initiative in the form of specialized courts. These courts were designed to provide a path other than incarceration that included a treatment plan of some type. These courts involve the collaboration of the offender, the judge, case managers, and other involved parties to implement a success plan for the offender. The first court of this type to be utilized in Ohio was drug courts (Knopp, 2015). These courts allowed those convicted on drug offenses who were addicted to drugs to pursue supervised treatment in lieu of incarceration. Due to the success of drug courts in Ohio, other courts were implemented including mental illness, domestic violence, and reentry courts. Ohio was among a group of selected areas to implement reentry courts with funding provided from the Second Chance Act (Knopp, 2015). These courts were implemented with the goal of aiding those returning to the community by providing support services and assisting them in reconnecting with their families and communities. These courts paved the way for future reentry program implementation in Ohio.

In 2001, Ohio created a Reentry Steering committee that reported guidance to six reentry action teams (Wilkinson, Rhine, & Henderson-Hurley, 2005). This committee and the action teams examined current reentry practices and highlighted areas that required improvement. They were guided with the ideal that police, courts, institutions, and

community corrections must all be involved to promote successful reentry. In addition, the family and different sectors of the community needed to be involved in order to achieve successful reintegration into society. The result of these considerations was the Ohio Plan which consisted of forty-four recommendations for major changes in Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections policies and procedures (Wilkinson, Rhine, & Henderson-Hurley, 2005). This plan included family involvement, assessment, and planning for returning citizens, employment readiness, discharge planning, supervision, and community partnerships. Another result of the plan was a new vision, mission, and slogan for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (Wilkinson, Rhine, & Henderson-Hurley, 2005). These changes all reflected Ohio's new focus on reentry. Ohio's vision for reentry is that returning citizens can connect as productive members of society through their mission of linking them with the services they need to succeed upon release.

Ohio's commitment to reentry efforts meant a complete overhaul and reevaluation of their criminal justice system and practices. These changes begin when an offender is admitted into the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. A reentry plan is started for all those entering the system and needs assessments are completed. Risk assessments are also completed to guide the institutional programming provided. Ohio also has programs in place for offender's families while they are incarcerated to work on relationships with their loved ones and rebuild trust. While incarcerated, Ohio offers a Job Linkage program that prepares the offender for employment upon release (Wilkinson, Rhine, & Henderson-Hurley, 2005). In turn, businesses are offered financial incentives and workshops on how to best work with returning citizens. There is also a group that

was formed for full community involvement. This group discusses ways in which to rebuild the community's trust in the returning citizen and involves assisting the victims of the crimes in addition to assisting the offenders (Wilkinson, Rhine, & Henderson-Hurley, 2005). Due to their history with success of specialty courts, Ohio also has addiction and mental-health-focused reentry programming. Multiple elements are often combined into reentry programming in Ohio in order to provide holistic assistance to the returning citizen. Although there are many dedicated areas within the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections that are focused on reentry, there are numerous county and city level programs that provide even more detailed assistance to returning citizens.

### **Montgomery County Reentry Efforts**

The Montgomery County Office of Reentry was created in 2010 to address the issue of reentry specific to Montgomery County, Ohio. Like many other areas of the country, recidivism rates were high in the early to mid-2000's and a solution was needed to reduce recidivism. The office was established with the mission of "Serving the citizens of Montgomery County with programs and services that minimize barriers to effective reentry and promote a reduction in recidivism" (Montgomery County Office of Reentry, n.d.). The funding to create this office was provided by a grant from the Jack W. and Sally D. Eichelberger Foundation of The Dayton Foundation. Funding has continued past the duration of the original grant through the Human Services Planning and Developing Department of Montgomery County. The office's main functions involve the facilitation of the Reentry Career Alliance Academy and the organization of the Reentry Collaborative with the support of the Montgomery County Reentry Council. The Reentry Career Alliance Academy (RCAA) is the program through which the office directly

interacts with returning citizens through programs and workshops. The Reentry Collaborative is a bi-monthly meeting of community stakeholders who work together to provide resources and programming for returning citizens. The Montgomery County Reentry Council is a council that was created in 2018 with the goal to streamline, focus, and support the mission of reentry. This council was created and populated by the Board of County Commission in 2018 and consists of sixteen members. They operate under the direction of the Co-Chairs County Commissioner Debbie Lieberman and Judge Walter H. Rice. This council “fosters conversations for change in the areas of employment, housing, legal issues, public education and advocacy, supportive services, and women in reentry” and they work to develop strategies to address the needs of those returning to Montgomery County from incarceration (Montgomery County Office of Reentry, n.d.).

The Reentry Career Alliance Academy consists of a career focused work readiness curriculum completed over the course of four weeks. Returning citizens attend an orientation session, workshops three days a week, a focus group, and then a graduation ceremony. Workshops are created with the assistance of the Reentry Collaborative and include topics of reentry planning, offender workforce development and retention, personal and family matters, social responsibility, behavioral health and management, housing, healthcare, financial literacy, networking, legal issues, education, and other supportive services. The program takes place at the Montgomery County Job Center. Throughout the academy there are multiple assessments made. These assessments include pre- and post-program questionnaires, need surveys, program satisfaction, and a variety of psychological and personality assessments (Montgomery County Office of Reentry, n.d.). Some assessments, such as risk assessment scores, are used to group returning

citizens into cohorts. These cohorts are established to provide the best possible chance for success in the program by addressing needs specific to each group. The combination of these assessments, workshops, focus groups, and the graduation ceremony aim to instill confidence and prepare the returning citizen to make a successful transition back into society

Participants are informed of the program in a variety of ways including probation or parole officers, programs while in prison, community program referrals, or by previous graduates. The RCAA is open to citizens who have previously been in prison or in jail. Participants do not need to have a recent conviction to participate. The program lists graduation benefits of community resource connections, daily transportation pass, onsite case management, resume preparation, mock interviews, career passport portfolio, move-in assistance eligibility, network building, a welcoming environment, and an employment referral if there is a favorable drug test result.

## **Theory**

Reentry is an issue that affects the offender, criminal justice system and society. It presents many challenges with few obvious solutions. One such issue is the lack of a theoretical framework to view the obstacles of reentry and identify areas that require assistance. Placing the challenges of reentry into the theoretical framework of life course theory provides insight on how to improve the process of returning to society. Life course theory places emphasis on examining all events over the course of an individual's life when examining their behavior. Factors that could have influenced that behavior include family structure, socioeconomic status, and historical events. Change in these factors



could affect the trajectory of an individual's life (Elder Jr, 1998). Trajectories refer to long-term patterns of behavior and are marked by life events and transitions. Transitions refer to specific life events that evolve over shorter time spans. These can include a first job or a first marriage (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Life course theory can be applied to criminology when considering engaging in crime as one of these factors. When examining criminal behavior through life course perspective, attention is drawn to life events and transitions that led to that behavior while also acknowledging risk factors as well. In addition to the factors listed above, a key aspect of life course theory is turning points. Turning points result from the interactions between trajectories and transitions within and across life stages (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Turning points refer to life events that can change the trajectory of an individual's life. When considering turning points in reference to reentry, a positive turning point could cause the individual to turn away from criminal behavior and engage with their community instead. Turning points that have proven to be effective in crime desistance include marriage, military service, education, work, and residential changes (Sampson & Laub, 2016). Other forms of community corrections, such as drug courts have been identified as turning points in the participant's life that has changed their life trajectory in a positive way. Drug courts have specifically been identified as a turning point (Messer, Patten, & Candela, 2016). By evaluating the personal growth and positive change that takes place in drug court it has been identified as a turning point in the former offender's life. These principles are applied in the current study by examining the change in participants after reentry program participation.

Relating to these life events, informal social bonds derived from social control theory can also have a significant effect on engaging in criminal behavior (Pratt, 2016).

Informal social bonds can come from one's community, family and friends and shape the way an individual interacts within society. These bonds influence criminal behavior over the course of one's life despite their potentially delinquent or antisocial background. Social bonds are present at every stage of life and the strength of those bonds can change across the life span (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Sampson and Laub focused on the tenet of social control theory that states crime and deviance result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken. Strengthening informal social bonds can prevent future criminal activity, while ignoring the significance of these bonds can be detrimental to the individual's future (Sampson & Laub, 2016). The contribution Sampson and Laub make to the life course perspective in examining criminology is a focus on the strength of informal social bonds. This addition to life course theory involves a more in-depth examination of life events by evaluating the effect of those events on one's informal social bonds in their life. The strengthening of informal social bonds requires the community to be engaged in the reentry process. Community engagement has been shown to influence criminal behavior in that the more involved a community is, the lower their crime rates are (Reiss, 1986). This involvement strengthens informal social bonds. This perspective also proposes that events in childhood can have long lasting effects on the trajectory of one's life. Informal social bonds created or ignored in childhood and adolescence can influence criminal behavior in adult life (Sampson & Laub, 1990).

The combination of life course theory with turning points and the importance of informal social bonds provide a holistic view of criminal behavior over the course of one's life. By examining the turning points and life factors that may stop criminal behavior, reentry programs can aim to include those influential factors to decrease

recidivism in their communities. Increasing the strength of informal bonds of returning citizens through reentry programming can also encourage long term positive associations with their community. As such, this study aims to identify RCAA program participation as a turning point to encourage criminal desistance and promote successful reintegration into society. The study also aims to add to research of reentry programs that focuses on holistic evaluations and program satisfaction from participants.

### **III. Methods**

#### **Data**

The current study is both a descriptive and exploratory study. No hypothesis was tested due to the lack of data on reentry courts and the exploratory nature of this study. This evaluation was a comprehensive approach to evaluating a reentry program and focused on analyzing the participant's experience in the program. The data for this research was provided by the Montgomery County Office of Reentry and pertains to the Reentry Career Alliance Academy program. The Montgomery County Office of Reentry de-identified the data before providing it to the author. Participants are assigned case numbers as their only identifying information. The data provided contained demographic information, recidivism statistics, psychological assessments, a pre- and post-questionnaire survey, and a program satisfaction survey. The data provided for recidivism was not consistent for each case number. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's data was only available for those who had reentered into their system and did not include comparison data for the remaining sample. The data that was available for recidivism statistics lacked variance in that 95% of the program graduates had not recidivated indicating there may be missing variance. Due to the difficulties within the recidivism statistics, only the pre- and post-questionnaire and the program satisfaction survey was used as there were responses given for each questionnaire and survey that were consistent with case numbers. Utilizing the pre- and post- questionnaires and the

program satisfaction survey provided a measure for what change occurred over the course of the RCAA program. The sample size for this study was 185. The sample size was determined by case numbers that had responses for both the pre- and post-questionnaire. As a result, all members of this sample successfully completed the RCAA program as those included had both pre- and post-responses. These responses begin with the RCAA cohort in July of 2016 to the cohort in March of 2018. Respondents' ranged in age from 19 to 70 with an average age of 41.46 years. In this sample, eighty-two point six of the participants were male and seventeen point four were female. Sixty-one-point two percent of this sample reported their race as African American, 36% reported Caucasian, 0.6% reported Bi-Racial, 0.6% reported Hispanic, 0.6% reported Multi Racial, and 1.1% reported other. For level of education, 48% have a High School Diploma, GED, licensure, or some type of certificate. Thirty five percent reported at least some college and the remaining 16.9% reported having less than a High School Diploma.

Analyses was conducted on the pre-program questionnaire and the post program questionnaire through SPSS for quantitative questions and qualitative responses were analyzed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro thematic analysis software. Appendix A shows the complete list of questions and the scales used. These questionnaires were given at the beginning of the first week of the program and then again on their last day. The pre- and post-questionnaires were identical. The questionnaire utilized both scaled responses as well as written responses. Missing data responses were removed in calculations by SPSS through listwise deletion.

## **Variables**

The pre- and post-questionnaire and program satisfaction survey contained many variables that could be analyzed for change over the course of the program.

Transportation, housing, and education variables were analyzed to see if change occurred in the responses over course of the RCAA program. Identifying change in these variables could provide insight to if the RCAA program was able to connect them with those resources. The scaled responses were also evaluated for change between pre- and post-questionnaire responses to see if the RCAA addressed issues relating to employment skills, personal attributes, community resource connection, and emotional skills.

Qualitative responses in the pre- and post-questionnaire responses were included as well to evaluate the change in resource requests and needs over the course of the RCAA program. The program satisfaction results, both qualitative and quantitative, were analyzed to see the participant's perspective of the RCAA program.

### **Transportation, Housing, and Furthering Education Variables**

Question C on the pre- and post-questionnaire asked about what mode of transportation the participants utilize. Participants were asked to select between own, public transportation, pedestrian, and carpool. If participants selected multiple options for this variable they were recoded into a multiple category. Recoding was necessary as participants were unable to indicate which transportation mode they used the most if they selected multiple choices. Transportation was analyzed for pre- and post-questionnaire changes as it was a frequently mentioned area of need in the qualitative questionnaire responses.

Housing was another area of need listed in the qualitative questionnaire responses. Housing was asked in question F on the questionnaire. Choices for the housing response included family/friends, halfway house, renting, and shelter or homeless. Similar to transportation, those who listed multiple housing options were recorded into a multiple response category. Participants could not indicate the percentage of time spent at each location if they selected multiple choices resulting in the need to recode into a new category.

Pre and post responses were also evaluated for Question E which asked, “Are you interested in furthering your education?” Respondents could select either yes or no for this question. Educational assistance was also mentioned on the qualitative responses as an area of need.

### **G, H, and I Question Subsets**

The next set of variables analyzed can be grouped into subsections based on their content. The variables in these subsets have scaled responses. Although some of the scales have different phrasing, the scales all range from one to five with five being the most positive response. Question I6 was the only question that did not follow this pattern and was recoded to align with the other scales used.

The first grouping were the questions beginning with G. There were eight questions in this subset and they asked the participants to provide a rating for each question. The questions in this subset corresponded to the participant’s finances, employment skills, and personal attributes. The first question is G1, rate your current financial stability. This question utilized a support scale that consisted of 1 = No Support, 2= Somewhat No Support, 3 = It is Okay, 4 = Somewhat Supportive, and 5 = Completely

Supportive. The next question, G3, in this subset asked respondents to rate their coping skills. The scale used for this question was 1 = Poor Coping Skills, 2 = Somewhat Poor Coping Skills, 3 = They are okay, 4 = Good Coping Skills, and 5 = Great Coping Skills. Question G 4 asked the respondents to rate their confidence and their ability to obtain what they need for the future. Responses for this question ranged from 1 = Not Confident, 2 = Somewhat Not Confident, 3 = It is Okay, 4 = Somewhat Confident, and 5 = Completely Confident. The next question, G5, asked participants to rate their ability to develop a financial plan. This question utilized an ability scale including 1 = Not at all Able, 2 = Somewhat not Able, 3 = It is okay, 4 = Somewhat Able, and 5 = Completely Able. Question G6 asked the respondents to rate their job skills on a scale including 1 = No skills, 2 = Somewhat No Skills, 3 = It is Okay, 4 = Somewhat Able, and 5 = Completely Able. Rate your interviewee skills, question G7, used the same scale as question G6. The final question in this subset, G8, asked respondents to rate the statement: "Joining this program, will put me on the right track to success". A truth scale was used for this question and consisted of 1 = Not true, 2 = Somewhat not true, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat True, and 5 = Completely True.

The next subset of questions, those beginning with H, all related to the respondent's connection to their community. The questions in this subset all used the same scale to rate their responses. The scale used was 1 = Extremely Poor, 2 = Somewhat Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, and 5 = Excellent. The first question, H1, asked respondents to rate the resources in their community to help them prepare their resume. The next question, H2, asked about resources in their community that would help them get a job. Rate your ability to apply for government assistance was question H3. Question



H4 asked respondents to rate community resources to help them get food. The final question in this subset, H5, asked the respondents to rate their overall available resources.

The final subset of questions all began with I. This question asked personal questions regarding their thought processes, anger, confidence, and ability to change. The first question, I1, asked if not having certain resources available made it harder to stay on the right path. The responses for this question included 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Question I2 asked how often the respondents thought about the mistakes of their past. The scale used for this question was 1 = Very Often, 2 = Often, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Not Often, and 5 = Never. The next question, I3, asked “At this time, how hopeful are you about your future?”. Responses for this question included 1 = Not Hopeful, 2 = Somewhat not hopeful, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat hopeful, and 5 = Very hopeful. Question I4 which asked, “At this time, how confident are you in your ability to obtain what you need for the future?” was removed from the analysis due to a large amount of missing data. The next question, I5, asked respondents if it was hard to change their old behaviors. The scale used was 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The final question was I6: “When things don't go my way, I become extremely upset”. The original scale was 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. However, even though the scale itself ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree, the nature of the question asked required the scales to be flipped. Through recoding in SPSS, the new scale was 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, and 5 = Strongly Disagree to reflect the content of the question more accurately.

Paired T tests were used to compare the pre- and post-means with RCAA participation as the independent variable for the questions mentioned above in each subset. These tests were used to determine if there is direction and statistical significance for questions that appear on both questionnaires. Mean differences were analyzed for the question subsets labeled G, H, and I. Questions that yielded direction and had higher scores in the post test would indicate that the program had a positive effect and could be considered a turning point in the participant's life. If scores stay neutral and have no direction it would indicate the program did not have an effect and if the post responses decrease it could be inferred that the program had a negative effect. Questions I7 and I8 were also removed as they were qualitative and were not evaluated in quantitative analysis.

### **Questions I7 and I8**

The remaining questions from subset I were analyzed using thematic content analysis. These questions were evaluated to determine what needs the participants had before the beginning of the RCAA program and what changes occurred to those needs occurred after the completion of the program. Question I7 asks "What are some areas you feel you need help with?" Question I8 asks "Are there any specific resources that you hope to connect with after you complete the Reentry Career Alliance Academy?" By using thematic content analysis, responses were placed into categories for both questions. These categories consisted of all, child support, education, employment, finance, food, housing, personal, volunteer, and transportation. The all category indicates that they requested assistance and resources for all areas. Those who answered child support needed assistance either with paying child support or obtaining visitation rights to their

children. Education responses included GED assistance, vocational training, and collegiate opportunities. Employment needs and resources requests included job skills training, interview practice, job application assistance, and job placement. Finance responses include budgeting assistance, bank accounts, savings, and financial education. Those who requested food resources and listed food as an area of need were mainly referencing food stamps and governmental assistance. Housing resource and need requests discussed expiring temporary housing, obtain VA housing, getting their own place, placement in a halfway house, or getting out of a shelter/ homeless situation. Responses categorized into personal included a variety of responses. Many requested wanting to change, mental health resources, substance abuse assistance, faith connection, anger issues, and emotional regulation. Volunteer responses indicated a desire to volunteer for the RCAA program or volunteer hours were required to obtain food stamps and other resources. The final category was transportation which included request for public transportation assistance, obtaining their own transportation, carpooling, and obtaining their driver's license. Frequencies were calculated for the ten categories listed above and compared across pre- and post-responses for questions I7 and I8.

### **Program Satisfaction Survey**

A program satisfaction survey was also given to the participants in the RCAA program on their final day. The sample is the same as the pre- and post-program questionnaires. The sample size for the program satisfaction survey was n=182 due to a few respondents from the first sample not filling out the satisfaction survey. This survey consisted of both questions with rated responses and questions with written qualitative responses. The scale used for all rated responses is 5 = Very, 4 = Somewhat, 3 = Neutral,

2 = Somewhat Not, and 1 = Not. The first scaled question asked how satisfied the respondents were with the programs schedule. The next question asked their level of satisfaction with the RCAA workshops. Question three on the survey was the first qualitative response. It asked what the most impactful workshop was for participants. The fourth question asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with the workshop presenters. Question five asked who they felt the most impactful workshop presenter was. This question was not used in the analysis as the responses were names of individual presenters and were not pertinent to this study. Question six was a scaled response and asked the level of satisfaction with the resources made available to them through the academy. The next question asked respondents how satisfied they were overall with the RCAA program. The final scaled question was removed from analysis due to a large amount of missing data. This question asked how satisfied they were with the support received through the RCAA program. Question nine asked the respondents how they thought the academy could be improved and requested written responses. The final question was also qualitative and asked, “Beyond the workshops, what has been the most beneficial aspect to your commitment to the Academy?” These survey questions can be found in Appendix 2 as well. Frequency analysis was conducted on the scale responses to determine the overall opinions on the program. Content analysis of themes was conducted on the written responses to determine if the participants find the program helpful and where there are areas for improvement. Responses were categorized based on similar criteria from the thematic analysis of questions I7 and I8 and added in specific workshops the participants mentioned if they did not fall into one of the ten categories

from the previous qualitative analysis. The comments section was also analyzed to identify reported areas for improvement and satisfaction with the program.

This combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses on both the pre- and post-questionnaires as well as the program satisfaction survey provided a holistic view of the returning citizen's experience in the RCAA. Examining significant differences in the pre- and post-questionnaire questions through paired T tests may support the RCAA being a turning point in the returning citizen's life. The other comparisons and analysis provided insight into change that has occurred in the returning citizen's life as a result of the RCAA and their opinion on the RCAA program. These evaluations not only revealed the personal effect the RCAA has on a returning citizen, but what aspects of the RCAA assisted the returning citizen and what needs improvement.

## **IV. Results**

### **Pre and Post Transportation, Housing, and Furthering Education**

The transportation variable was recoded into own, public transportation, pedestrian, carpool, or multiple types of transportation used. On the preprogram questionnaire for this sample, 19.7% had their own form of transportation, 58.4% utilized public transportation, 2.2% listed pedestrian as their mode of transportation, 6.2% carpooled, and 13.5% use multiple modes of transportation. On the post program questionnaire, 25.4% said they had their own transportation, 54.7% used public transportation, 2.2% listed pedestrian as their mode of transportation, 4.4% carpooled, and 13.3 % listed multiple transportation modes.

Housing was recorded as living with family or friends, living in a halfway house, renting, shelter or homeless, or multiple housing situations. On the preprogram questionnaire for this sample, 25.6% were living with family or friends, 34.7% were in a halfway house, 21.6% were renting, 14.2% were living in a shelter or homeless, and 4% listed multiple housing situations. On the post program questionnaire for this sample, 26.6% were living with family or friends, 29.9% were in a halfway house, 22.3% were renting, 9.8% were living in a shelter or homeless, and 11.4% listed multiple housing situations.

Participants were also asked if they had an interest in furthering their education. Respondents answered either yes or no to this question. On the preprogram questionnaire 74.4% showed an interest in furthering their education and 25.3% did not. On the post program questionnaire 75.4% showed an interest in furthering their education and 24.6% did not.

### **Pre and Post Questionnaire Paired T Test**

Of the 18 pairs tested for pre- and post-mean comparison, nine were significant. All significant pairs had a Cohen's D value over 0.80 indicating a large effect. All results can be found in Table 1 below. The first significant pair was question G1: Rate your current financial stability. Pre and posttest scores were moderately and positively correlated ( $r=0.49$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Pretest scores were lower than posttest scores ( $p<.010$ ) with 95% confidence intervals (CI)  $[-0.35, -0.07]$ . Question G2: Rate the emotional support received from family or friends was also significant. Pre and posttest scores were moderately and positively correlated ( $r=0.61$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Pretest scores were higher than posttest scores ( $p<.050$ ) with 95% CI  $[0.00, 0.34]$ . The third significant pair was Question G4: Rate your confidence and your ability to obtain what you need for the future. Pre and posttest scores were moderately and positively correlated ( $r=0.40$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Pretest scores were higher than posttest scores ( $p<.01$ ) with 95% CI  $[0.10, 0.42]$ . Question G7: Rate your interviewee skills was significant. Pre and posttest scores were moderately and positively correlated ( $r=0.51$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Pretest scores were lower than posttest scores ( $p<.001$ ) with 95% CI  $[-0.48, -0.18]$ . H1: Resources in the community to help you prepare your resume was also significant. Pre and posttest scores were weakly and positively correlated ( $r=0.27$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Pretest scores were lower than posttest scores

( $p < .001$ ) with 95% CI [-0.63, -0.25]. The next significant pair was H2: Community resources to help you get a job. Pre and posttest scores were moderately and positively correlated ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Pretest scores were lower than posttest scores ( $p < .001$ ) with 95% CI [-0.62, -0.25]. Question H5: How would you rate your overall available resources was significant. Pre and posttest scores were weakly and positively correlated ( $r = 0.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Pretest scores were lower than posttest scores ( $p < .010$ ) with 95% CI [-0.40 -0.06]. Question I2: How often do you think about the mistakes of your past? was significant as well. Pre and posttest scores were moderately and positively correlated ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Pretest scores were lower than posttest scores ( $p < .010$ ) with 95% CI [-0.53, -0.14]. The final significant pair was Question I6: When things don't go my way, I become extremely upset. Pre and posttest scores were moderately and positively correlated ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Pretest scores were higher than posttest scores ( $p < .050$ ) with 95% CI [0.01, 0.30].

Three of the significant questions had mean differences in which the post test was lower than the pretest. These questions were for rate the emotional support received by family and friends, rate your confidence and your ability to obtain what you need for the future, and when things don't go my way, I become extremely upset. These results indicate that after participating in the program, change occurred in which the participants were indicating less familial support, confidence, and increased anger responses. The remaining six questions all had responses that indicated that the program had a positive effect as the posttest responses were higher than the pretest responses. These questions included rate your financial stability, rate your interviewee skills, access to resources in your community to help prepare a resume, access to community resources to help you get



a job, overall resource availability, and “how often do you think about the mistakes of your past?”.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Paired T Test Results**

Pair	Question	N	Pretest	Pretest	Posttest	Posttest	95 % CI For		Mean Difference	r	t	df
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	G1	184	1.65	0.96	1.86	0.92	-0.35	-0.07	0.49	-3.03*	183	
Pair 2	G2	184	3.74	1.39	3.57	1.22	0.00	0.34	0.61	2.02*	183	
Pair 3	G3	182	3.90	1.09	3.82	0.89	-0.06	0.23	0.50	1.10	181	
Pair 4	G4	180	4.14	1.03	3.88	0.97	0.10	0.42	0.40	3.20*	179	
Pair 5	G5	181	3.67	1.20	3.69	0.96	-0.19	0.17	0.39	-0.12	180	
Pair 6	G6	182	3.99	0.99	3.91	0.91	-0.05	0.22	0.52	1.19	181	
Pair 7	G7	182	3.49	1.13	3.82	0.94	-0.48	-0.18	0.51	-4.27*	181	
Pair 8	G8	180	4.47	0.79	4.48	0.71	-0.13	0.11	0.43	-0.19	179	
Pair 9	H1	181	3.57	1.17	4.01	0.93	-0.63	-0.25	0.27	-4.63*	180	
Pair 10	H2	181	3.35	1.20	3.78	1.04	-0.62	-0.25	0.37	-4.65*	180	
Pair 11	H3	182	3.58	1.27	3.55	1.02	-0.17	0.21	0.37	0.23	181	
Pair 12	H4	181	3.50	1.25	3.65	0.92	-0.34	0.05	0.28	-1.46	180	
Pair 13	H5	182	3.58	1.03	3.81	0.90	-0.40	-0.06	0.26	-2.64*	181	
Pair 14	I1	183	3.72	1.22	3.78	1.06	-0.27	0.15	0.19	-0.56	182	
Pair 15	I2	181	2.50	1.23	2.84	1.11	-0.53	-0.14	0.37	-3.45*	180	
Pair 16	I3	179	3.84	0.93	3.69	0.84	0.01	0.30	0.41	2.17*	178	
Pair 17	I5	182	2.44	1.19	2.59	1.13	-0.34	0.04	0.36	-1.53	181	
Pair 18	I6	179	2.16	0.93	2.31	0.84	-0.30	-0.01	0.41	-2.170*	178	

\*p < .05

### Pre and Post Questionnaire: Questions I7 and I8

Thematic analysis was conducted on questions I7: “What are some areas you feel you need help with?” and I8: “Are there any specific resources that you hope to connect with after you complete the Reentry Career Alliance Academy?” Thematic Analysis was completed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro. Responses for questions I7 and I8 were coded into ten different categories consisting of all, child support, education, employment, finance, food, housing, personal, transportation and volunteer. All coding frequencies can be found in Table 2 below. For question I7: “What are some areas you feel you need help with?” in the prequestionnaire there were four hundred and thirty-three responses coded into the ten categories listed above throughout the sample. Three responses indicated they wanted help in all areas or with “everything.” Child support or child visitation rights were mentioned in eight responses. Forty responses indicated a request for educational

assistance. The most frequently reported response for this question was for employment or employment skills at one hundred and ninety-six responses. Twenty-five responses mentioned financial assistance. Ten responses indicated needing connection to food related assistance. The second most-frequent response was housing assistance with seventy-six responses. Personal assistance was coded for sixty-one responses. Thirteen responses indicated needing assistance with transportation. One respondent inquired about volunteer opportunities. The total coded responses for question I7 on the prequestionnaire was four hundred and thirty-three responses.

Responses for question I8: “Are there any specific resources that you hope to connect with after you complete the Reentry Career Alliance Academy?” were also coded into the ten categories listed above and followed a similar pattern. Three responses mentioned need assistance with all areas or “everything.” Seven inquired about child support services. Thirty-two responses involved educational resources. Employment related skills were again the most frequent response at ninety-seven responses. Five indicated they needed financial assistance. One inquired about food assistance after the program was completed. Thirty-eight responses mentioned housing support. Even related to personal matters. Four responses mentioned transportation and another four responses inquired about volunteer opportunities. The responses for this question were much less frequent at two hundred and two responses.

The post questionnaire number of responses for Question I7 was much lower than the prequestionnaire. There were two hundred and seventy-one responses in the post questionnaire compared to the four hundred and thirty-three responses in the prequestionnaire for Question I7. Only one respondent indicated they wanted assistance

in all areas on the post questionnaire I7. There was only one response for child support assistance as well. Thirteen responses mentioned education assistance. Employment assistance was still the greatest area of need with one hundred and thirty-seven responses. Sixteen responses included financial assistance. Ten responses indicated that food was an area for need. Fifty-nine responses mentioned housing as a concern. Twenty responses related to personal reasons. Fifteen inquired about transportation assistance. There were no volunteer request responses for this post question.

Unlike question I7, there was an increase in responses in the pre- and post-questionnaires for question I8 concerning resource assistance. On the post questionnaire, two hundred and twenty-six responses were recorded compared to two hundred and two on the prequestionnaire. Five responses indicated they wanted to be connected with as many resources as possible. One response mentioned child support assistance. Seventeen responses requested educational resources. Employment was again the most requested resource at one hundred and nineteen responses. Seventeen requested financial resources and seven requested food assistance. Forty-four responses mentioned a request for housing resources. Nine contained personal responses. Five indicated a need for transportation resources. Two respondents requested connection with volunteer opportunities.

Employment skills were the most requested resource across both questions in the pre- and post-questionnaires. Housing was the second most-frequent response across all questions as well. Education and financial assistance also had high response rates. The lowest request for assistance across all questions was for volunteer connections. There was a decrease in responses for the pre to post for question I7 which asked what areas

they needed assistance in. The responses increased for question I8 which asked what resources they wanted to be connected with upon completion of the program.

**Table 2: Question I7 and I8 Pre and Post Questionnaire Frequencies**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Pre I7</b>	<b>Pre I8</b>	<b>Post I7</b>	<b>Post I8</b>
All	3	3	1	5
Child Support	8	7	1	1
Education	40	32	13	17
Employment	196	97	137	119
Financial	25	5	16	17
Food	10	1	10	7
Housing	76	38	59	44
Personal	61	11	20	9
Transportation	13	4	15	5
Volunteer	1	4	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>226</b>

### **Program Satisfaction Survey**

The program satisfaction survey contains both quantitative and qualitative responses. The quantitative responses were all measures of satisfaction with various areas of the RCAA program. Responses consist of Not At All Satisfied= 1, Somewhat Not Satisfied = 2, Neutral = 3, Somewhat Satisfied = 4, and Very Satisfied = 5. The percentage frequencies of responses for each satisfaction question can be found in Table 3 below. Missing values were removed from analysis in SPSS through listwise deletion. For question one, “How satisfied were you with the program’s schedule?” Sixty-point six percent of the sample answered very satisfied. Twenty-seven-point two percent answered somewhat satisfied. Nine-point four percent answered neutral, 2.2% answered somewhat not satisfied and 0.6% answered not at all satisfied. The next scaled response, question two, is “How satisfied were you with the Reentry Career Alliance Academy workshops?” Sixty-nine-point three percent of the sample answered very satisfied follow by 22.7%

answering somewhat satisfied. Eight-point four percent answered neutral and 1.7% answered somewhat not satisfied. No respondents in this sample selected not at all for this question. Question four was “How satisfied were you with the workshop presenters?” Seventy-one-point nine percent answered very satisfied. Nineteen-point seven percent answered somewhat satisfied and 8.4% answered neutral. No respondents selected somewhat not satisfied or not at all satisfied for this question. The next question was the sixth and asked, “How satisfied are you with the resources made available to you through the academy?” Sixty-six-point one percent of this sample indicated they were very satisfied when answering this question. Twenty-five-point three percent indicated they were somewhat satisfied, and 8% answered neutral. The remaining 0.6% answered they were not at all satisfied. The final scaled response used in this analysis, question seven, asked “Overall, how satisfied were you with the Reentry Academy?” Seventy-seven-point five percent answered very satisfied and 16.9% answered somewhat satisfied. Five-point one percent responded neutral and 0.6% answered somewhat not satisfied.

Overall, the responses for the scaled questions on the program satisfaction survey were very positive. The means for each question were all between the somewhat measure and the very measure. The large majority for each question was for a response of very satisfied followed next by somewhat satisfied. Only one question had a response of not at all satisfied. Participant opinions of the program were positive overall and over 75% of the sample was very satisfied with the RCAA program.

**Table 3: Program Satisfaction Survey Descriptive and Percent Frequencies**

Number	Question	N	Mean	SD	Not at All	Somewhat not	Neutral	Somewhat	Very
1	How satisfied were you with the program's schedule?	180	4.45	0.8	0.60%	2.20%	9.40%	27.20%	60.60%
2	How satisfied were you with the Reentry Career Alliance Academy workshops?	179	4.58	0.72	0.00%	1.70%	8.40%	20.70%	69.30%
4	How satisfied were you with the workshop presenters?	178	4.63	0.63	0.00%	0.00%	8.40%	19.70%	71.90%
6	How satisfied are you with the resources made available to you through the Academy?	174	4.57	0.67	0.00%	0.60%	8.00%	25.30%	66.10%
7	Overall, how satisfied were you with the Reentry Academy?	178	4.71	0.58	0.00%	0.60%	5.10%	16.90%	77.50%

In addition to the scaled responses, the survey has qualitative response answers that were analyzed as well. The first qualitative question analyzed is question three. This question asked, “What was the most impactful workshop for you in the Academy?” The most frequently reported workshop for this question was the one relating to obtaining employment at eighty-one responses. Many responses mentioned the mock interviews and “Telling employers about my criminal history.” Another respondent gained employment after attending one of the workshops indicating that “It was the DHL workshop that introduced me to a gainful employment opportunity.” The second most frequent reported were the finance and business-related workshops with fifty-three responses. Many of these responses mentioned budgeting and establishing credit. One respondent said, “The financial workshops that talked about ways to manage your spending.” Personal growth-related workshops accounted for thirty-nine responses. In addition to responses about positivity and change one respondent said “Dealing with stress and how to control it” was a helpful skill learned in a personal workshop. Thirty-one respondents said all the workshops were impactful to them. One respondent said “All of them. Sometimes we as people feel that we might not need to know about something because we are not exposed to it. But that is so far from the truth.” Another respondent said, “All of them taught me a lot that will help me grow.” Twenty reported the housing

workshops. One response mentioned a contact who will be available to provide assistance to those who need it in obtaining housing. Twelve responses mentioned the education-related workshops. Many of these responses mentioned a local community college that came in for a workshop. The child support workshop accounted for eleven responses. Four respondents indicated the child abuse and victim awareness workshop was impactful. In reference to the victim awareness portion of the survey one respondent said, “The workshops about victims and knowing how you treated people [were impactful].” Three responses listed workshops that helped them with the food stamp process were impactful. One respondent said, “Help with insurance [and] food stamps”. Another interesting response that was received was regarding Narcan training the respondents received. One response said “Narcan workshop- Saves Lives!”

The next qualitative question analyzed was “In your opinion, how can the Reentry Career Alliance Academy be improved?” This was the ninth question asked. The responses for this question ranged greatly throughout the sample. Many responses said they liked the content of the program and would not change anything. They expressed gratitude for those who run the program and the resources provided. The largest request for changes was to bring in more employers. Many of the participants indicated they would have liked to have employers come in who were offering positions to those with a criminal record. Others also requested that more mock interviews should be included to prepare them for interviews. Another frequent request was to make the program longer. They felt some workshops were cut short due to insufficient time and requested a few more days to cover the material presented. Participants also requested that they receive more one-on-one time with program facilitators and case managers. They wanted more

personal time with these facilitators to help guide them through processes, such as employment and obtaining housing. A few participants also requested meals be provided in the program as they had difficulty obtaining food. Some recommended that the program be a residential program and offer housing as well.

The next questions analyzed was question ten, “Beyond the workshops, what has been the most beneficial aspect to your commitment to the Academy?” The most frequent responses for this question involved personal growth. Many mentioned that completing the program was beneficial to them as it proved that they could finish and be successful. Other responses mentioned faith, confidence, positive change, and goal setting. The staff were also frequently mentioned in these responses as being beneficial resources. Peers were also mentioned as they felt it was beneficial to go through this process with individuals in a similar situation. For this question, many referenced that resume writing and mock interviews were very beneficial. They also mentioned either job placement or job referral as beneficial upon the completion of the program. Overall, these responses were very positive and grateful.

The last section analyzed was the comments section of the survey. Participants who answered in this section were overwhelmingly positive. One respondent indicated that the RCAA was a “very helpful program that has helped me link with many community resources.” Similarly, a response stated, “I feel the program has gave me the tools I need to keep me on the right track.” Another stated that “Reentry Career Alliance Academy works. Attitude affects everything.” Gratitude was present in many responses as well. One respondent said “Thanks to all the people who work so hard to put all of this together. It is so so needed. Good Job!!” One response highlighted the importance of



staying committed to the program as he stated, “I am glad I committed to this program. At first, I was skeptical and almost didn't come back after the first day, I am glad I stayed with it.” Many responses also mentioned the importance of the change that occurred in themselves. One participant stated “I [was] hopeless and now I am not.” Another stated that the RCAA program “Raised my hopes and attitude with many things I hope the commitment is always there for everyone by everyone. Thanks for great empathy.” Although many responses were positive, a few mentioned the specific issues sex offenders deal with and the extra difficulty in obtaining employment and housing as a registered sex offender. One response in particular said “Companies that hire felons (felon friendly) unfortunately do not have RSO's (Register Sex Offenders). Programs like this need to discuss this problem with their partners to get beyond this major hurdle. Note that RSO's have the lowest recidivism rate”. Others mentioned again the request for more time, more mock interviews, and specifically more time on filling out job applications. One specifically stated, “There needs to [be] filling out application on get a job so we know how to fill it out, more time on mock interview.” Although some participants were not completely satisfied and felt that there were areas for improvement, the overall comments were very positive. One respondent offered to volunteer to speak with future classes if they wanted a former graduate to come in.

## **V. Discussion**

### **Pre and Post Transportation, Housing, and Furthering Education Results**

By examining the responses of transportation for the pre- and post-questionnaire results, a slight change occurred for the “own” transportation and public transportation variables. The number of those who stated they had their own mode of transportation increased by almost six percent. In comparison, the public transportation variable decreased from pretest to posttest by almost four percent. The other variables including pedestrian, carpool and multiple forms of transportation did not change much from the pre to post responses. Pedestrian responses stayed consistent, carpool decreased by less than two percent and multiple decreased by less than half of a percent.

These results do not show drastic change in transportation from the pre to post responses. The increase in own forms of transportation could indicate that the RCAA program was able to connect them to new transportation. The assistance in gaining their driver’s license could have allowed participants to utilize their own transportation after program participation. However, most respondents were still relying on public transportation at the completion of the program. These results were not surprising based on the relatively short duration of the program and the cost of transportation. Public transportation is a much more affordable alternative to both the purchase and upkeep of a personal vehicle. Public transportation also removes the obstacle of requiring a license if obtaining one went beyond the scope of the assistance from the RCAA program. Public

transportation is a viable option for many participants if it can connect them to the areas they need to go. To maintain a job, one must be able to get there and on time to stay in good standing with your employer. If public transportation cannot connect them to their employment, they will need to find alternate transportation. This variable will be important to track in future cohorts of the RCAA as it affects multiple areas of the participant's life such as employment, obtaining food, and accessing resources they need to successfully reintegrate.

The housing variable with the most substantial change in the pre- and post-questionnaire responses was for respondents who were living in multiple housing arrangements. There was an increase in those staying in multiple types of housing in the post questionnaire. The second largest change was a reduction in those staying at a halfway house by almost five percent. The responses for homeless or staying at a shelter reduced by almost four and a half percent. Those staying with family and friends only had a one percent increase and those renting increased by almost one percent. The obstacle of housing presents similar difficulties to transportation. As the program is only four weeks long, opportunities for securing better housing will most likely require more time than the duration of the program. Housing options present many financial obstacles that would require employment to be the priority as well. Rent would be the largest financial obstacle to face or a down payment if they were able to purchase a home. Besides rent or a mortgage, one must then pay utilities, other house bills, and furnish a home or apartment. However, the RCAA program can connect its participants with housing resources to pursue when they are ready and financially stable enough to obtain their own housing. This stable housing connection is also crucial for those who want to

have visitation with their children or potentially custody of their children. The RCAA program should continue to provide as many housing resources as possible to help their graduates reach their goals. As housing is much more difficult to obtain with a criminal record reentry programs should continue to innovate new ways to assist returning citizens with housing challenges (Phillips & Spencer, 2013).

At the beginning of the program, an overwhelming majority of respondents were interested in furthering their education at almost seventy five percent. In the posttest, that number increased slightly to almost seventy-five-point five percent. Although this was not a large increase in those interested in furthering their education, it is still a little over three quarters of the responses. Those who participated in the RCAA program will now have connections to whatever level of education they wish to pursue including college courses. This interest in increasing their education bodes well for a future of reintegrating into society and obtaining gainful employment. This interest and eventual pursuit of education could also be considered a turning point in a participant's life. Education can open doors to new opportunities that a returning citizen may not have previously had. College-level coursework can open up new career fields that require more than a high school level education. However, college-level work is not required to be a turning point in one's life. Furthering education could include finishing a GED or receiving vocational skills trainings. All forms of increasing education can lead to more lucrative employment opportunities which are a proven turning point in the lives of those returning to society (Sampson & Laub, 2016).

## **Pre and Post Questionnaire Paired T Test Results**

Six of the eighteen pairs tested in the paired T Test were significant and had higher posttests scores than pretest scores. Rate your current financial stability, G1, was the first pair that satisfied these conditions. This result indicates that the RCAA program had a positive impact on how the respondents viewed their financial stability. The RCAA program provides workshops on budgeting, financial management, and brings in speakers from local banks which could explain this increase in financial confidence. Rate your interviewee skills, G7, also showed an increase in post test scores. Interview techniques and mock interviews were a focus in this reentry program. The abilities learned through the program have shown to increase the interview skills the participants have. The next two pairs to satisfy the conditions of significance and a higher posttest score, H1 and H2, both related to similar areas. H1 asks the respondent to rate the resources in the community in to help them prepare their resume and H2 asks them to rate community resources to help them get a job. Both questions inquire about the respondent's ability to access resources to help them secure employment. The increase in posttest scores for these variables indicate the RCAA program does a good job at connecting their participants with community resources who assist with employment. The next pair, H5, asks about overall resources available in the community. Similar to H1 and H2, this significant result shows that RCAA participants are introduced to many community resources throughout the program. Specifically, the change in H5 indicates that employment is not the only area for which community resources are provided. The final significant pair with higher posttest scores is I5, "How often do you think about the mistakes of your past?" This result is interesting as it is the only personal variable that

was significantly improved over the course of the RCAA program. The other significant pairs with higher posttest scores related to finances, community resources, or employment skills. This variable indicates that the RCAA program encourages participants to look forward instead of looking back. This could be accomplished directly through the program addressing this issue and encouraging participants to focus on their futures. It could also be accomplished indirectly in that the resources and education provided from the RCAA program give participants the ability to move on from their past.

Three of the pairs tested in the paired T Test were both significant and had higher pretest scores than post test scores. The first pair, G2, asked the respondent to rate their emotional support received from family friends. The results of this test indicate that, over the course of the program, respondents indicated that they were receiving less support from family and friends than at the beginning of the RCAA program. This decrease in support may indicate that the RCAA program did not focus enough on strengthening relationships with their support groups. The next pair in this scenario was G4 which asked respondents to rate their confidence and ability to obtain what they needed for the future. This response highlights another area in which personal issues such as confidence may not be addressed enough in the RCAA program. The final pair that was both significant and has higher pretest scores was I8 which asked respondents to respond on a scale of strongly agree to disagree to “When things don’t go my way, I become extremely upset.” Respondents scores decreased in the posttest meaning that they were more likely to have an increased anger response as compared to when they began the program. This finding could have resulted from the program addressing the obstacles the returning

citizens face and the difficulties in overcoming them. Acknowledging the challenges they will have to face could have been overwhelming. The three questions with this result all relate to personal issues. Emotional support, confidence, and anger responses all stem from personal obstacles or issues the returning citizen faces. These significant results indicate the RCAA program may want to integrate more personal growth programming to address these areas of need. This could be accomplished by integrating more mental health or emotional checks. If participants are frequently in communication about their emotional well-being, they will have a deeper understanding of their emotional reactions and needs. Workshops could also be improved or added that solely focus on emotional well-being and personal issues. These workshops could present opportunities for participants to request assistance in these areas. Normalizing these emotional and personal obstacles will make them less challenging to returning citizens. Emotional aspects should also be integrated into other workshops. The workshops presented can be a lot of information and at times be filled with obstacles they will have to overcome. Integrating their emotions into the different obstacles addressed in the program will assist participants in moving forward in their lives.

The T-Test results indicate that the program is effective but there are also areas for improvement. The questions that had both significant results and a higher posttest scores all related to areas that the RCAA program has set forth as intentions of the program. The most important intention being connecting the participants to community resources that will allow reentry assistance to occur long after completion of the RCAA program. In addition, resume skills as well as interview skills will provide the participants with lifelong techniques to assist them in any future employment endeavors.

The increase in financial stability also indicates an increase in financial knowledge to guide them in the future as well. The switch from focusing on the past to moving into the future also indicates the participants were ready to move on with their life and towards criminal desistance. These results all provide support that RCAA participation is a turning point in these individual's lives. Participation in the RCAA program has resulted in increased employment skills and ability to access resources that can connect them with employment. As employment has been proven to be an effective turning point, the RCAA program provides not only a path to employment but also provides security in other life areas to help them move forward (Sampson & Laub, 2016). The combination of resources and skills provided by the RCAA program provide participants with a pathway to integrating into society and desisting from future criminal behavior. The positive responses regarding community resource connection indicate a stronger bond to the community. This increased relationship with the community is an indicator that the RCAA program is effective in strengthening informal social bonds. Participants also referenced the importance of peer groups that are going through similar things. Having individuals who are also trying to desist from crime and move forward with their lives was a helpful support group for returning citizens. As friends are also an informal social bond, this increase in connection with positive peer groups can also strengthen these bonds. Both life course theory and social control theory guided this research in identifying the RCAA as a turning point and recognizing community and peer connection as strengthening of informal social bonds.

Although these results were very promising for the RCAA program, the other significant and non-significant responses indicate there may be some room for



improvement. As the significant questions that had higher pretest scores all related to personal issues, the RCAA program may want to focus on integrating more emotional well-being and personal growth programming. The RCAA program has proven through this sample to be a positive change for external resources and skills required to reintegrate into society. However, a deeper focus on an individual's personal characteristics and emotions could increase the holistic positive effect of the RCAA program. The RCAA can work to implement more personal growth programming. By addressing issues such as coping skills, change, confidence, and hope through workshops and frequent check ins, the RCAA program could give participants the skills for personal growth. This growth will support them throughout the reentry process and give them the attributes needed to be successful in society. The non-significant questions also provide an opportunity for improvement in the RCAA program. Questions that did not have significant change in the pre and posttest include coping skills, financial plan development, job skills, obtaining government assistance and many personal attributes including change, confidence, and hope. These areas all could benefit from improvement to increase the program's effects on these variables. Increasing programming in these areas in the RCAA would be a step towards causing holistic change in an individual. Increasing the number of financial workshops could assist in financial plan difficulties. The RCAA program could also implement a workshop in which they help the participants create a financial plan. The skills learned in this kind of workshop could help the participants to make future financial planning decisions that keep them on the best paths possible. As food assistance is already addressed in a workshop, governmental assistance could be added to that workshop. Educating participants on what governmental

services are available to them and connecting them to resources in this area can provide them with new paths to becoming independent and addressing areas of need. As employment is frequently covered in workshops, a deeper focus should be placed on job skills. This area of the employment programming should be reevaluated to increase its usefulness within the RCAA program.

### **Pre and Post Questionnaire: Questions I7 and I8 Results**

Questions I7 and I8 were quite similar to each other in content. I7 asks what areas the respondent feels they need help with I8 asks if there were any specific resources that they hope to be connected with after they complete the RCAA program. Although they were similar, the responses yielded valuable responses in both the pre- and post-questionnaire. The total responses for areas of need decreased across the pre and posttests. An interesting pattern emerged specifically for the variables of employment, financial assistance, and housing. In the posttest responses for question I7 there was a decrease in areas of need for these variables. Conversely, in the posttest responses for question I8, there was an increase in their request for resources. This pattern indicates that the RCAA program may have addressed these areas of need, but the participants still wanted connection to resources upon program completion. The number of posttest responses were higher than the pretest indicating that the program may have connected participants to resources they were not aware of previously. Upon completion of the program participants wanted more information on resources that could help them in the future.

Across all questions pre and post, employment was the most requested resource connection and area of need. In the pretest, I7 had one hundred and ninety-six responses

for employment as an area they needed assistance with and ninety-seven indicated they would want employment resources upon program completion. In the post test, this number reduced some to one hundred and thirty-seven responses for I7 but increased to one hundred and nineteen responses or question I8. These results at first seem to conflict with the paired T Test results. Three of the significant T-tests with higher posttest scores related to employment and the participant's ability to access resources relating to employment. This analysis only provides more support as to why qualitative research matters with reentry studies. Although there was significant positive change for three of the employment related variables, there is still room for improvement as indicated by the participants. The most frequent request was for more direct connection with employers who hired those with a criminal record. At present, the reentry program focuses more on providing the participants with the tools and skills to obtain employment and not as much on direct connection to an employer. This could be another consideration for the RCAA program to implement more introductions to employers willing to hire those with criminal records.

Housing was the next most requested area of need and resources and maintained consistent for the posttest answers as well. This compared with the changes observed for pre- and post-responses indicate that housing is still an obstacle for some after completing the program. Housing is still the second-most popular area of need or access to resources proving that any housing additions to the program would be welcome to participants. Some responses in this area indicated specific assistance in obtaining for housing for those with a sexual offense on their record. These individuals have even more obstacles in addition to only having a felony record due to the nature of their offense.

Educational opportunities were the next most requested but saw a drop in both an area of need and as a resource. This result could indicate the program does a good job at connecting those who are interested to education resources. The same result occurred for financial needs as post responses dropped in comparison to the pretest.

Personal issues had a large drop as an area of need for pre to post responses. Although the three significant pairs that had higher pretest scores in the paired T-Tests all related to personal issues, this variable decreased as an area of need. Similar to the employment variable, the addition of the analysis for questions I7 and I8 adds to the overall analysis of the RCAA program. The negative change in the T-Tests can be offset by the reduction in area of need responses. These results indicate that personal growth resources are available to participants but more of an emphasis may need to be made to expand their effectiveness to more participants.

The other variables with fewer responses also provide insight into the program. On the pretest for both areas of need and resources, three respondents indicated they wanted or needed assistance in all areas. For the areas of need this reduced to one person in the post test, but five respondents wanted connection to as many resources as possible upon graduation. This result shows how returning citizens were attempting to be as successful as possible as they return to society. Fifteen respondents indicated that child support assistance as an area of need or they requested resources in this area. In the post test only two respondents inquired about child support. This is a positive indicator that the RCAA connected them to the appropriate assistance throughout the program. Two variables did not change much in both the pre- and post-tests for either question. Transportation as an area of need changed from thirteen responses to fifteen in the

posttest. As a requested resource, transportation went from four responses to five responses. These responses in addition to the only slight changes in the pre- and post-transportation question pose an area of improvement for the RCAA program. Specifically, some responses requested carpool assistance or bus tokens while attending the program. The same number who indicated food assistance as an area of need in the pretest indicated the same for the post test. For resources, only one respondent requested food resources in the pretest compared to seven in the posttest. When food assistance is mentioned, it was usually regarding food stamps. A non-significant question in the paired T-Tests asked their confidence in obtaining governmental assistance. As food stamps were mentioned specifically, along with a few requests for disability assistance, focusing on governmental assistance may be an important addition for the RCAA program. The final category of response included volunteer opportunities. The type of volunteer opportunities ranged in the responses. For example, one respondent indicated volunteering as an area of need in the pretest. The response indicated that volunteer experience was required for them to obtain food stamps. This response also stated that the respondent felt that volunteer experience would help them secure a job. In the posttest no respondents indicated volunteer as an area of need. However, volunteer resources were requested in both the pre and posttest at four respondents and two respondents, respectively. These responses indicated both employment assistance through volunteering as well as request to volunteer with future RCAA classes.

Analyzing the pre- and post-responses of these two questions reveals much more than solely relying on the scaled responses. Similar to the paired T- Test results, these two questions provide both areas of improvement and insight into what is working for the

participants. Based on participant responses, they would like to have more connection to employment and housing resources. This finding was not present in the paired T-Test results and shows the importance of a holistic approach to reentry programs. By considering these post program needs and resource requests, the RCAA program can add to or highlight areas of their program to further support their graduates.

### **Program Satisfaction Survey Results**

The results from the scaled responses provided in the program were overwhelmingly positive. Each of the scaled questions had over sixty percent of the respondents chose an answer of very satisfied. The next most common response was somewhat satisfied. The combination of these two responses accounted for over eighty percent of the responses. This result shows that over eighty percent of the sample was satisfied in some way with the program schedule, workshops, presenters, and availability of resources. Specifically, when asked about their overall satisfaction with the RCAA program, ninety-four-point four percent respondents responded that they were at least somewhat satisfied with seventy-seven-point five percent answering very. This satisfaction survey gives an insight into the participants perspective on the RCAA program which has been shown to be positive. However, analyzing the qualitative responses of the program satisfaction survey provides an even more in-depth view into what they thought was worthwhile.

The first qualitative question asked about which workshop had the greatest impact on them. Following the pattern of the results from both the paired T-Tests and the analysis of questions I7 and I8, employment workshops were the most frequently mentioned for this question. Specifically, participants found the mock interviews to be

very helpful. These mock interviews give the participants the opportunity to practice an interview situation in real time. Some have never been formally employed or may be nervous going back into the workforce after time in prison. Mock interviews give the participant the opportunity to practice and prepare so that they can have more confidence when entering a real interview. Other employment workshops mentioned included assistance in building their resumes. As mentioned earlier, some participants have little to no technology experience. Creating an appropriate resume can be a challenge to anyone, let alone if they do not have experience using a word processing system as well. Responses that mention the RCAA teaching them a skill they previously did not have further confirm that the RCAA is a turning point in the respondent's lives. As employment has been proven to be a turning point in life course theory, teaching participants the skills required to obtain employment is a life-changing moment. Many respondents also reported the financial workshops as being worthwhile. A local bank made a presentation that many participants found useful. These skills are very important for returning citizens as they may need to create banking accounts as well as establish budgets to help them get back on their feet. A large group also reported personal growth variables including goal setting, accountability, and pursuing a better path. These reports are another indicator of the RCAA program as being a turning point. Turning points reference an intervention in which the returning citizen shifts aspects of their life to move away from criminal behavior and towards more pro-social behaviors. This change in mindset and desire to make positive change indicates the RCAA program prepares its participants to move past their old life and make significant changes. This finding is also important as the paired T- Test revealed that improvements in the personal growth-related

areas of the workshop may be needed. This finding supports their importance in future RCAA changes. Although there were less answers for the remaining variables, their results also convey important findings. Only twenty reported housing workshops as impactful when the analysis of earlier questions indicates there is a need for housing support. This could be another area of improvement for the RCAA program to consider. Other responses included the education workshops, child support, child abuse awareness, victim advocacy awareness, and food stamps. Although not as frequent, these workshops were still seen to be impactful by participants. Also, over thirty responses indicated that all workshops were impactful to them further emphasizing the importance of all the workshops provided.

The next qualitative question asked participants how they thought the program could be improved. These responses provided both praise and valid suggestions for improvement. Many respondents said that they would change nothing about the program and expressed gratitude for the assistance the program provides. Once again, the most common request for improvement involved employment. As mentioned in the post I7 and I8 questions, there were many requests for employers who hire those with a criminal record to be brought in. The requests seem to indicate that participants feel they would benefit from a job fair type of workshop. This could be a good recommendation for the program if they could secure enough employers to take the time to come in. However, the RCAA program seems to focus on providing the skills to be independent and obtain employment on their own. Along those lines, participants also requested more mock interviews. They appreciated the skills the mock interviews they completed gave them and wanted more of them. The next few requests all involve time-related issues.



Participants seemed to feel overall that the RCAA program was too short. They felt extra time to practice interviews and other skills would benefit them. They also requested that the presenters be given more time. Multiple responses mentioned feeling rushed or as if some workshops were cut off. Other request included, providing food, transportation, and housing while enrolled in the program. Although all these additions would benefit those in need, they all would be very costly for the RCAA to implement. They would also require other resources such as the space and staff to accommodate these requests which are most likely not possible.

The final qualitative question and the comments section had similar results. This question asked, “Beyond the workshops, what has been the most beneficial aspect to your commitment to the Academy?” These responses were very positive. Participants mentioned the job referral and placement upon graduation from the program as beneficial. Both comments and the responses to this question expressed gratitude for the program as well as the staff. Many mentioned that their ability to commit to the program and finish something was very beneficial. Other responses were mainly personal including goal setting, confidence, positive change, and their faith. These personal attributes are important in understanding the whole reentry process. These personal responses indicate that there is more to the reentry process than securing employment and integrating into society. Personal change must take place for them to commit to a crime free life and having the proper support in that process is important.

The comments section was mainly expression of gratitude. Some expressed the importance of this program for future returning citizens and offerings were made again of volunteering for the RCAA program. Although it seems like there is positive support

overall, there were some requests for changes in the comments as well. The concerns regarding those with a sexual offense were mentioned again highlighting the importance of a focus on this area. The RCAA program already groups higher risk returning citizens together to tailor the experience to their needs and support those at lower risk levels at the same time. A consideration could be made for a cohort specific to the challenges of those with a sexual offense as it does not affect the whole population of RCAA participants but does need to be addressed. Other comments mentioned the same requests as previous questions in an increase in program time, more mock interviews, and the importance of securing employment.

These program satisfaction results give a deeper look into the experiences of the returning citizen. As many of the responses were positive, it appears as though the RCAA is deemed as beneficial to those participating in the program. Their recommendations for changes are also very important. If within the RCAA's ability, these changes could greatly improve the RCAA program experience. Some recommendations are outside the scope of what the RCAA program could do, but all recommendations are important to evaluate. The RCAA program's intent is to improve the reentry experience of returning citizens. Therefore, former participants would be the best group to hear recommendations from. They provide invaluable insight on what assists those returning to society and what changes need to be made to improve the program.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The combination of paired T-Test results, analysis of qualitative questions from the pre- and post-questionnaires, and the program satisfaction survey responses provides a much more holistic view of the RCAA program effectiveness. Quantitative results seem

to indicate that the RCAA is a turning point in respondent's lives. The change in employment variables from pre to posttest were significant in a positive direction, indicating that the RCAA program prepares their participants to obtain employment after completion of the program. Employment is a proven turning point in life course theory indicating these results support the RCAA as a turning point (Sampson & Laub, 2016). The qualitative results then fill in missing areas in the quantitative research. Qualitative results also support the presence of social control theory and life course theory in this reentry program. The qualitative data results provide more support for the RCAA program being a turning point in these individual's lives. Many mentioned the life changing effects of the resources and skills provided in the RCAA program. The skills mentioned will support them as they move past the program and navigate the rest of the reentry process. The staff support and workshop material provide them with the resources to make real change after they leave the program, furthering supporting RCAA participation as a turning point.

In addition to turning points, informal social bonds from social control theory are strengthened throughout the RCAA program. Resource connection was also a positive significant result from the paired T Tests. As connection with one's community is an informal social bond, this access and utilization of community resources is strengthening of that bond (Sampson & Laub, 1990). In addition, the positive qualitative responses that mention the assistance of the staff are another informal social bond being strengthened. By strengthening informal social bonds with community stakeholders and colleagues, respondents are establishing new positive connections that will assist them in the reentry process. A third informal social bond strengthened as a result of RCAA participation is

peer group formation. The RCAA cohorts establish peer groups in which participants are experiencing many of the same challenges. When this bond is strengthened, participants can rely on the support of those who have been through similar experiences instead of becoming frustrate and disenfranchised with the reentry process. All examples of strengthening of informal social bonds serve to increase prosocial community connections and promote criminal desistance (Sampson & Laub, 1990).

This intervention of the RCAA program after release from prison provides them with the ability to change their lives moving forward. They are provided with employment skills and resource connections that had a significant change over the course of the program. The qualitative data confirms the importance of the information and support gained through the RCAA program only further indicating that they will have the tools to make positive decisions moving forward and desist from future criminal behavior.

### **Limitations**

Evaluating reentry programs presents many difficulties due to the differences between programs. Each reentry program is different as there are few guidelines if any. Guidelines can be provided at the state, county, or local levels but those guidelines are generally vague. Some reentry programs only offer assistance in certain areas such as employment while others are more faith based and may not provide life skills training. Certain programs offer housing and food and others only meet a few times a week. The length and format of reentry programs vary greatly. In some areas, there are not any other programs to model after and there are no formal guidelines given. Due to this variability in reentry research, it can be difficult to compare one program's effectiveness

to others. This issue also calls into question what it means for a program to “work.” Most research completed on reentry programs uses recidivism as a measure of success in a program. If the program participants have a lower recidivism rate than the general population the program is considered to be successful. While recidivism is a main goal of reentry programming it does not take into account other factors that affect a returning citizen. Studies that focus on the overall experience of the returning citizen, such as the current study, are scarcer than studies that focus on recidivism alone. This limitation affects this study in that it is difficult to compare these findings with other programs nationwide to evaluate if the program is successful.

The data provided from the Montgomery County Office of Reentry presented a limitation in that the data only included those who graduated from the RCAA program. The pre- and post-program questionnaires used in this study were matched for participants who graduate from the RCAA program. The Montgomery County Office of Reentry does not attempt to contact those who drop out of the program to have them complete the questionnaire a second time. This means there was not a comparison group to compare with this study’s result. This presents a limitation in that the effects of the RCAA program cannot be compared to those who are navigating returning to society without assistance. This sample size therefore consists of only those who were able to complete the program. Those who were unable to complete the program may have had to dropout due to various reasons, some of which may be effects of returning to society. By being unable to review their questionnaire or program satisfaction surveys there may be other factors affecting the reentry process of which the RCAA program is not aware. This

specific limitation also reduced the sample size of the study as both pre- and post-questionnaire responses had to be available.

Another limitation is the difficulty in obtaining data across reentry programs. Returning citizens may not have access or be familiar with technology programs. This prevents certain programs from using computer-based registration and can increase the reliance on handwritten data. The Montgomery County Office of Reentry often must rely on handwritten data and then manually input that data. Then, when software changes or other issues arise in data collection software, data can be lost or does not translate properly into a new system. The Montgomery County Office of Reentry encountered this obstacle, which can account for some of their missing data points that could not be used in this research. As a result of these challenges in data collection, there were missing data points for respondents and inconsistencies in what data is available per year. Although the focus of this study is not on recidivism, if more data were available for triangulation, recidivism would have been added as well. The data presented did not have sufficient variance to report a recidivism statistic. The recidivism data also only reported if graduates of the program had been rearrested, convicted of new offense either at the Ohio state level or a federal offense, or returned to prison for a parole violation and did not include program dropouts or jail data. Had access to ODRC databases been possible, cross references to verify recidivism statistics could have been used to validate the recidivism rates. Improvements in the data collection process for the RCAA could greatly improve their reporting of recidivism as well as other program success factors. These improvements could also lead to more funding opportunities if the program has definitive data proving its effectiveness.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a limitation for the current study as well. The RCAA program and the Montgomery County Office of Reentry had to switch to a remote environment during the first emergency shutdown of non-essential businesses in Ohio in April of 2020. This switch to a remote environment presented many challenges to the program facilitators as they had to find a way to connect returning citizens to the same resources and workshops in a remote environment all while ensuring they had access to the proper technology to participate. This transition to a remote environment also prohibited the author from doing a site visit during one of the RCAA program sessions or attending a graduation. Had a visit been possible, the author could have had the opportunity to conduct interviews with program participants and ask more in-depth questions about the challenges of returning to society.

### **Future Research**

The current study supported the ongoing need for further research for reentry programs. The RCAA program has similarities to other existing programs but it also has unique attributes, such as the numerous types of workshops offered. Workshops that the Montgomery County Office of Reentry provides include of reentry planning, offender workforce development and retention, personal and family matters, social responsibility, behavioral health and management, housing, healthcare, financial literacy, networking, legal issues, education, and other supportive services. These workshops were presented both by program staff as well as members of the community. To promote the expansion of reentry programming, all types of reentry programs should be studied. Current research on reentry programming is limited to what specific factors should be included to prevent recidivism. This focus often leads to employment-based programming.

Employment is a key factor in promoting successful reentry as evidenced by the needs expressed in the RCAA program. However, focusing solely on employment leaves out many types of other programs. Reentry programming based in faith practices or personal development are not studied as often as they do not have quantifiable variables that have been shown to reduce recidivism. This does not mean that these programs do not prevent recidivism but rather quantifying their effect can be difficult. Approaching reentry programming in a holistic way that considers recidivism and the offender experience will expand the understanding of what makes a program effective. Researching various programs will reveal what aspects of these programs work well and may introduce a program to a new offering. By publicizing what works in different programs all reentry programs can benefit. Increasing awareness of successful program tactics only serves to increase the likelihood of reintegration for the returning citizen. With more awareness, those returning to society will be able to select the reentry program that will best fit their needs and provide them their best chance for a successful future.

Two variables that require more study in the reentry process are housing and transportation. The RCAA program responses frequently mentioned these two variables as an area of need or a request for resources. Employment was the most frequently requested but it is one of the most studied variables and was addressed thoroughly in the RCAA program. Housing presents an interesting challenge as there can be many different obstacles. To start, some landlords do not rent to those with a criminal record. If they can then find housing that will accept their record, further considerations can be made regarding their offense type. RCAA program responses mentioned the challenges that those with a sexual offense in obtaining housing that seem to exceed the challenges of



those with other offenses. Finding housing can be difficult but buying a house presents even more difficulties. Obtaining more research on the challenges returning citizens face when looking for housing could not only increase awareness of this issue but also provide suggestions for how to add more housing assistance into reentry programming.

Transportation also needs further research as a variable affecting reentry programming. Some form of transportation is required for participants to attend reentry programming. RCAA Participants requested either ways to pay more public transportation to get them to the RCAA program or a carpool option. These same challenges would exist for needing transportation to get to a job and meetings with criminal justice representatives such as parole officers. In addition to the challenges of getting to necessary locations, research needs to be conducted regarding the difficulties in obtaining their own transportation. Public transportation is not always accessible and may not be an option for some returning citizens. It can be difficult for returning citizens to regain their license upon release from prison. RCAA responses mentioned this as an obstacle. Purchasing a car would present a large financial obstacle and financing can be difficult to obtain with a criminal record. Present research does not frequently evaluate the challenges surrounding transportation upon release and, similar to housing research, an increase in transportation research could add to existing and new reentry programming.

An important area for future research is connection with those who start reentry programs but do not complete them. Contact with this group is important for multiple reasons. The first reason for this elongated contact is to have a comparison group to contrast with the results of the graduates. This type of analysis could reveal if obtaining

employment, housing, and other areas of need was greatly improved by participation in the program or not. Another reason to maintain contact with this group is to see why they stopped attending the program. Evaluating these reasons could enlighten reentry programs to reentry obstacles they were unaware of that prevented a participant from continuing. The opinions of those who did not complete the program can be crucial in revealing if there are aspects of their program that need to be changed. Finally, maintaining contact with those who do not complete the program could connect them with resources they may still need even though they were unable to finish the program. Staying connected with this group could present challenges to researchers but financial or resource incentives could be offered to ensure contact is maintained. By adding in research that includes the opinions and outcomes of those who do not complete reentry programs, reentry research as a whole will become more well-rounded. Having a comparison group to compare graduates to will provide both an indicator if the program is worthwhile and more support for why reentry programming is important.

Quantitative research is very important for the growth of reentry programs. When there is enough variance in data collected, many different tests can be performed to show effectiveness of a program in different ways. Quantitative research will result in more robust recidivism statistics. As one of the main goals of reentry programs, increasing quantitative research on recidivism will provide a good measure of effectiveness. Increasing quantitative research will be important for funding opportunities as well. Funding bodies, whether through the government or through private organizations, often want to have concrete quantitative data that proves effectiveness before they will donate. Although there can be expenses associated with implementing new data collection

practices, the benefits can outweigh the costs when considering funding. Data collection and analysis can be time consuming and may require a dedicated staff member to manage data. Implementation of comprehensive databases of demographic information, questionnaires, assessments, and surveys will allow data to be utilized in multiple ways. Additionally, utilization of statistical software will provide program facilitators with a tangible way to present statistics on their effectiveness. By organizing data in an efficient manner and analyzing it in functional ways, reentry programs will have the ability to exhibit their necessity in their communities as well as look for areas for improvement.

Qualitative data can also be useful in securing funds. If it is used in addition to quantitative data, qualitative data can provide personal experiences and testimonies that can show a human side to the program as well. Qualitative data also provides a more well-rounded perspective of a reentry program and its effectiveness. When only quantitative data is analyzed, important variables can be missed. Solely relying on numerical data, even rating scales, removes the participants experience. For example, RCAA participants liked the employment offerings and rated them highly in responses. However, they also mentioned they wanted more time focusing on interview skills. These Responses highlight the importance of listening to the program participant's perspective. If responses like these are missed, important aspects of the programs can be missed. Qualitative responses should be present in many areas of reentry programming. These responses should allow respondents to expand their answers, express unaddressed areas of need, express their honest opinions of the program, suggest areas of improvement, and indicate what areas really assisted them. Categorical answers do not always give the whole picture when surveying reentry needs and issues. Anonymity is also important for

some areas of qualitative research, specifically in program satisfaction surveys. If participants are concerned, they may not get the same referrals or resources if they express their honest opinion, they may omit things that could improve the program. Giving participants a safe place to express their likes and dislikes will give a more well-rounded understanding of a program's effectiveness. Qualitative data provides the unique experiences for the participant to have a voice in the process. By utilizing qualitative data, the researcher can get the participant's view on what really helped them in the reentry process and what obstacles they could have used more help with. Maintaining contact with participants could also yield impactful results. Understanding how the reentry program they participated in impacted them moving forward could be important. Inclusion of both those who completed and those unable to complete the program would also give comparison points for the impact of the program. Keeping contact with these groups could be difficult as they may not have their own contact information, may relocate to a different area, or may be reluctant to come back. Allowing the option for participants to volunteer could alleviate some of these issues. This future contact could be discussed in the program and allow participants to provide their contact information if they wanted to. Incentives, either financial, food based, expansion of resources, or other types, could help to increase the likelihood of staying in contact. Having this kind of information could contribute to a workshop that prepares them for what is to come in their time after the reentry program. Qualitative data can also reveal personal positive impacts of reentry programs on the returning citizen. These personal accounts and comments can also be used when applying for funding as it adds in a human perspective in addition to statistics. As there is not much qualitative data present on

reentry programs, any additions would add to making reentry research more well-rounded and holistic.

Moving forward, future research of reentry programs should include both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. By adding in both types of research, new variables can be studied. Future research in reentry program should include comprehensive demographic information to evaluate with statistical testing if there are any specific obstacles or needs certain demographics have. Demographic data to be collected would include age, race, gender, marital status, and previous military service. Adding qualitative comments to demographic information should also be included to understand all facets of the participant's experience. Collecting information on employment, education, transportation, housing, and personal attributes will also benefit both quantitative and qualitative data. Participant's opinions should also be collected on their areas of need, program satisfaction, areas for improvement, and other comments on the program in general. Having more data to work with can allow statistical analysis to assess the possibility of mediating or moderating effects that can highlight program issues as well. Qualitative data will add in variables that are not expressed through quantitative answers. This holistic research can be used as a guiding principle for new reentry programs that are just beginning. With research to back up their format, new reentry programs will have a better start to reduce recidivism in their communities. This combination of research methodologies will provide a holistic perspective on reentry programs that can both appeal to those providing funding and the community at large.

A hindrance for implementation of reentry programs is the cost they present. In order to secure funding, especially when a reentry program is run through local or state

government, public support is integral. The community surrounding a reentry program is vital for implementation and survival. The largest barriers to public support are a potential increase in taxes and the stigma surrounding those who have been incarcerated. Research is needed surrounding public support of reentry to determine effective ways to remove those barriers. If the public can view reentry programs as worthwhile initiatives that will improve their communities, they may be more likely to support them. Similarly, research can be used to further understand the stigma about those who have been incarcerated. This stigma assumes that everyone who has been in prison is dangerous and will not contribute to society. As reentry programs aim to reverse both those assumptions, they can be the connection to the community to promote further understanding. Using the results from these research efforts, reentry programs can educate and engage with their communities to break down barriers.

Increasing research on reentry only serves to enhance the experience of both the participant and the community. As research on reentry programming increases, participants will get a more effective program through recommended improvements. The community benefits in a reduction of crime in their communities. The criminal justice system will also benefit from further research in reentry programming as it can have support for implementing new reentry initiatives.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Programs such as the RCAA offered through the Montgomery County Office of Reentry are a step in the right direction for changing the mindset of the criminal justice system. The RCAA connects returning citizens to their communities with resources involving employment, housing, and many other areas that set the returning citizen on a path for success. This study strongly supports the conclusion that the RCAA is successful in providing employment skills to its participants as well as connecting them with the resources they need to be successful in society after the program. Participants were very positively impacted based on their program satisfaction survey results. Participants also offered areas for improvement that assist future participants. Connecting returning citizen's with employment opportunities can be a turning point in their life and prevent them from committing future crimes. The RCAA program can be a turning point in its participant's lives as this study revealed its success in connecting them to employment skills and community resources. Community resources also serve to strengthen informal social bonds and provide positive community interaction.

Although the RCAA was shown to be effective at providing employment skills and resource connection, there is room for improvement. A greater need for personal and emotional assistance were expressed that could be implemented into the RCAA programming. Another important implementation would be for more cohort groups. Those with sexual offenses expressed their additional challenges and their need for more

assistance. Implementing cohorts could better address the needs of specific offenses and provide each group with their best chance at success. Lengthening the program is another recommendation to fully serve the needs expressed by participants. As the RCAA is currently a three-day program, even a one-day extension could provide the participants the extra assistance they need. By periodically evaluating the needs and recommendations for improvement expressed by program graduates, the reentry program can aim to improve their services to assist as many participants as possible. Reentry programs should be fluid in their offerings as the needs of each cohort may change. External forces, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, also present greater necessity for fluidity. If reentry programming can mirror the needs of its participants as time moves on, they will have greater success. This fluidity can be achieved by listening to the participants and constantly looking for areas of improvement.

Many other programs across the state of Ohio aim to effectively reduce recidivism as well but are not widespread across the state. Ohio has a lower recidivism rate than the national average, but that rate could be further reduced by expanding reentry programming into areas that do not currently have reentry assistance. The next step for reentry programming in Ohio and beyond is expansion. Reentry programs should be accessible to all those who are returning from prison. Areas that do not currently have reentry programming will benefit greatly from studying the needs of their returning citizens and looking for ways to increase reentry programs. As studies continue to show the promising effects of reentry programming, allocating state tax funding to these programs could be beneficial for both the community and those involved in the criminal justice system. Currently, existing reentry programs should also focus on areas in which



they can improve as well. Implementing employment, housing, transportation, personal, and financial programming along with connection to community resources will set their participants on the path to reintegration. This engagement from the community starts with breaking down the stigma attached to those who have been incarcerated. This stigma is often a significant barrier between the community and the returning citizen as community members may have preconceived notions about returning citizens. By engaging in the reentry process and getting to know these individuals, the community can begin to see those returning to society in a positive light instead of relying on presumptions.

Reentry programs should become more widespread across the nation to tackle the looming issue of mass incarceration. By aiding those returning to their communities, the cycle of reoffending upon release can be stopped. However, implementation of reentry programs does more than only reduce recidivism. Those returning to their communities from prison are presented with many obstacles they need to overcome. If they do not adjust well, they can return to engaging in criminal behavior which negatively affects their community. The communities these individuals return to should be engaged with assisting in the reentry process as it only serves to help make the community safer. Regardless of individual opinions, most of those incarcerated will be released and returned to the communities from which they came. This leaves the community members to either resist helping those returning from prison and promote criminal activity or assist them and promote a positive and welcoming environment. When the community engages and supports a returning citizen, those citizen's informal social bonds are strengthened. The RCAA program connects its participants to resources and individuals in their communities that will assist them throughout the reentry process. In addition to

strengthening informal social bonds, the RCAA program had a significant impact on both employment and resource availability indicating it is a turning point in the returning citizen's life. By giving a returning citizen employment skills and resources required to obtain employment, completion of this program could be a life changing moment for the returning citizen by providing them with a path to reintegration. This results in a combination of social control theory in strengthening informal social bonds and life course theory in identifying the RCAA program as a turning point. By incorporating these two tenets of these theoretical ideals, the RCAA program is changing the lives of its participants and leading to criminal desistance.

As reentry programs expand and research on those programs increases, reentry will grow as a focus for the criminal justice system. Increasing awareness about these programs is crucial for giving communities the opportunity to start engaging in the reentry process. This awareness will promote a shift to focusing on reentry instead of the current deterrence-based mindset across the nation. This shift will be a positive change for all. Communities will have reduced crime rates and increased safety. Those formerly incarcerated will be able to not only integrate into society but also lead successful and independent lives. The criminal justice system will benefit by prison numbers being reduced and communities experiencing less re-occurring crime. Reentry programs require engagement from the community, returning citizen, and the criminal justice system but they provide hope for a future in which the criminal justice system can both protect communities and rehabilitate offenders.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Pre and Post Program Questionnaire**

A. How did you hear about the Reentry Career Alliance Academy? Please Specify:

B1. Race

B2. Gender

B3. Age

B4. Age at time of first conviction

B5. Age at time of most recent conviction. If you have only had one conviction, this  
may be the same as above.

B6. Have you ever been incarcerated?

B7. If you have been incarcerated, what is your length of release?

B8. Current Legal Status? Please Specify:

B9. Highest level of education completed? Please Specify:

C. Transportation

D. Which of the following industries are you interested in? Specify:

E1. Are you interested in furthering your education?

(Yes or No)

E2. If so, in what field?

F1. What is your current housing situation?

F2. Length of time in current housing or living arrangement?

G1. Rate your current financial stability

(1 = Not at all Stable, 2 = Somewhat not Stable, 3 = It is Okay, 4 = Somewhat stable,  
5 = It is completely stable)

G2. Rate the emotional support received from family/friends

(1 = No Support, 2= Somewhat No Support, 3 = It is Okay, 4 = Somewhat Supportive, 5 = Completely Supportive)

G3. Rate your coping skills

(1 = Poor Coping Skills, 2 = Somewhat Poor Coping Skills, 3 = They are okay, 4 = Good Coping Skills, 5 = Great Coping Skills)

G4. Rate your confidence and your ability to obtain what you need for the future

(1 = Not Confident, 2 = Somewhat Not Confident, 3 = It is Okay, 4 = Somewhat Confident, 5 = Completely Confident)

G5. Rate your ability to develop a financial plan

(1 = Not at all able, 2 = Somewhat not able, 3 = It's okay, 4 = Somewhat able, 5 = Completely able)

G6. Rate your job skills

(1 = No skills, 2 = Somewhat no skills, 3 = It's Okay, 4 = Somewhat able, 5 = Completely able)

G7. Rate your interviewee skills

(1 = No skills, 2 = Somewhat no skills, 3 = It's Okay, 4 = Somewhat Able, 5 = Completely able)

G8. Rate this statement: "Joining this program, will put me on the right track to success".

(1 = Not true, 2 = Somewhat not true, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat True,  
5 = Completely True)

H1. Resources in the community to help you prepare your resume

(1 = Extremely Poor, 2 = Somewhat Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent)

H2. Community resources to help you get a job

(1 = Extremely Poor, 2 = Somewhat Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent)

H3. Rate your ability to apply for government assistance

(1 = Extremely Poor, 2 = Somewhat Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent)

H4. Community resources to help you get food

(1 = Extremely Poor, 2 = Somewhat Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent)

H5. How would you rate your overall available resources

(1 = Extremely Poor, 2 = Somewhat Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent)

I1. Not having certain resources available, makes it harder to stay on the right path

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

I2. How often you think about the mistakes of your past?

(1 = Very Often, 2 = Often, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Not Often, 5 = Never)

I3. At this time, how hopeful are you about your future?

(1 = Not Hopeful, 2 = Somewhat not hopeful, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat hopeful,  
5 = Very hopeful)

I4. At this time, how confident are you in your ability to obtain what you need for the  
future? (ie. housing, job, insurance, etc.)

(1 = Not Confident, 2 = Somewhat Not Confident, 3 = It is Okay,  
4 = Somewhat Confident, 5 = Completely Confident)

I5. It is hard to change old behaviors.

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

I6. When things don't go my way, I become extremely upset

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

I7. What are some areas you feel you need help with?

I8. Are there any specific resources that you hope to connect with after you complete  
the Reentry Career Alliance Academy?

## **Appendix B**

### **Program Satisfaction Survey**

1. How satisfied were you with the program's schedule?

(5 = Very, 4 = Somewhat, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Somewhat Not, and 1 = Not)

2. How satisfied were you with the Reentry Career Alliance Academy workshops?

(5 = Very, 4 = Somewhat, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Somewhat Not, and 1 = Not)

3. What was the most impactful workshop for you in the Academy?

4. How satisfied were you with the workshop presenters?

(5 = Very, 4 = Somewhat, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Somewhat Not, and 1 = Not)

5. Who was the most impactful workshop presenter for you in the Academy?

6. How satisfied are you with the resources made available to you through the Academy?

(5 = Very, 4 = Somewhat, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Somewhat Not, and 1 = Not)

7. Overall, how satisfied were you with the Reentry Academy?

(5 = Very, 4 = Somewhat, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Somewhat Not, and 1 = Not)

8. How satisfied were you with the support received through the Office of Reentry?

9. In your opinion, how can the Reentry Career Alliance Academy be improved?

10. Beyond the workshops, what has been the most beneficial aspect to your commitment to the Academy?

11. Comments